

# Grantee Response to Recommendations from the Assessment of Ryan White Part A Administration Report

*September 17, 2008*

A clear Request for Proposals (RFP) process is the first step in ensuring that service providers can address the needs of PLWHA as reflected in needs assessments and the Council's service priorities and resource allocations.

In general, providers found that RFP was clear in terms of requirements, eligibility, purpose and objectives of the Part A program, but less so in describing the review process. Many providers preferred a longer time to complete their proposals, but did not want it over the December-New Year's holidays. Most felt that the last RFP technical assistance session (November 2007) was good in describing the proposal requirements, but not useful in the extensive discussion of contract documents.

## **Request for Proposal**

### ***Recommendation***

The grantee should review the RFP, update it with current core service requirements, eliminate redundancies and clarify formatting and other requirements. The RFP should explain why documentation needed for contracting, e.g., 501(c)(3) status, incorporation documents, must be submitted with the proposal. The TA session should be structured to present proposal requirements first, and contracting requirements second, to the extent that this latter information is needed.

## ***Grantee Response***

***The Grantee has discussed the need to review and restructure the format of the RFP in order to improve its clarity and conciseness, as well as keeping it more in line with the changes in the grant as a result of the RWMTA. The recommendations set forth by the providers have already been considered and will be used as one of the critical components to guide the Grantee in the restructuring of the RFP for fiscal year 2009.***

### ***Recommendation***

The timeline for completion of the RFP should be reviewed and adjusted if feasible to allow more time for providers to complete the proposal but not interfere with November-December holidays. At the same time it should allow sufficient time for grantee review, recommendation, decision, and

allocation upon receipt of the City of Newark Part A grant award. If the timeline cannot be adjusted, the grantee should provide an explanation to providers.

**Grantee Response**

***The Newark EMA grant application process for fiscal year 2009 will begin in October 2008, once the Grantee application to HRSA (due 9/29/08) has been submitted. This is necessary to ensure the RFP released to eligible sub-recipients is reflective of the current requirements mandated by the funding source. During the early weeks of October, the RFP will be updated, sent out for printing and the availability of funding will be publicly advertised for three consecutive days. Therefore, the release date for this year's RFP will be set for early November (approximately three weeks earlier than the previous fiscal year). This will give the Grantee ample time for appropriate modifications and to have the document mass-produced and returned by the printing company.***

***For fiscal year 2008, eligible applicants were given approximately one month to complete the application. Based on this timeframe, the Grantee should be able to set the deadline for submission of proposals by mid-December. This will give the providers an additional two weeks to prepare their proposals.***

***The recommendations by providers can be adequately addressed, however, it is important to note that the RFP process is initiated by HRSA's notice of funding to the Grantee. Last year's application to HRSA was due in November, which created an RFP process that ran into the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.***

**Recommendation**

Feedback regarding the strengths, weaknesses and reasons for amount of funding should be given to all providers to help improve future proposals and services. The grantee can determine the method of feedback, e.g., orally or in writing.

**Grantee Response**

***As is standard, service providers should consult their program monitor regarding questions related to funding. However, this year's RFP will include a section which clearly outlines critical factors used to determine eligibility and extent of funding.***

## **Placement of Contract**

### ***Recommendation***

Although Award Letters are issued to providers only after receipt of the federal award by the City of Newark this often comes at the very end of the fiscal year or start of the new fiscal year. Thus, the grantee should investigate if there is some mechanism within public contracting law to alert providers of the estimated amount of their new award earlier. If this is not possible, then the grantee should explain this to providers, possibly at the TA session. The grantee should also issue Award Letters to all providers simultaneously.

### ***Grantee Response***

***For fiscal year 2009, the Grantee will generate a notification letter to all applicants regarding the status of their proposal. The letter will be generated in February (once all proposals have been evaluated and scored) and will include anticipated funding and areas of service delivery. However, the Grantee cannot issue any information regarding specific funding without receipt of an official award letter from HRSA. It is critical to clarify that sub-recipient funding is not only impacted by the overall award amount to our EMA; the grantee will need to adhere to the Core Service allocation requirement of 75%, as well as the priorities set forth by the EMA Council within a +/- range of 25%. This regulatory and forward thinking analysis takes time that the Grantee minimized by anticipating various scenarios in advance of award letter receipt.***

### ***Recommendation - Priority***

The contracting process must be revised within the City of Newark so that contracts are executed timely and as close as possible to the start of the fiscal year. This is a high priority. The grantee should designate one individual in the Ryan White Unit to process all contracts on a full time basis. Standard procedures and contracting templates/forms must be developed to handle the forty-plus Ryan White contracts in Newark legal department.

### ***Grantee Response***

***The Grantee has worked diligently with the City's Law Dept. and Business***

**Administrator's Office to ensure the City's contractual process and required documents are clear to all key participants. The Grantee has communicated to all parties the importance of the grant purpose (as an emergency response) and the hardship that ensues when legal requirements are modified in mid-stream of the contracting process. Grantee's legal advisor will be working with the Law Department to produce a template which Ryan White office can use as a guide in processing sub-recipient service contracts. The Law Department and Business Administrator's Office have assured the Ryan White Office that no changes will be enforced mid-stream once this format is established.**

**In the past, the Grantee had a designated staff person to process all contracts. However the departure of that staff person contributed to some of the delays which occurred during the 2007 fiscal year. The lack of increased funding and the guideline changes from RWMTA, which requires the Grantee to use Administrative dollars to cover Planning Council and Program Support expenses, severely limits our ability to fund that position.**

**While in the past the Grantee had a designated "contract" staff person designated to facilitate this activity, the reduction in funding impacted the Grantee's ability to continue to have a designated staff member. However, the current process of each monitor having the responsibility of preparing contracts for their designated service providers, will offer monitors the opportunity to understand the full scope of their sub-recipients administrative status.**

**Recommendation**

The process to augment contracts – notification, revision and execution - should be standardized within the Ryan White Unit and follow revised procedures in #2B.

**Grantee Response**

**The process to augment contracts is standardized. The Grantee will make every effort to ensure SOP's for contracts are adhered to by staff and made clear to the provider.**

**Service Provider Reimbursement**

**Recommendation - Priority**

The Ryan White Unit, Fiscal Unit of the Department of Child and Family Well-Being, and City of Newark Finance Department must resolve the issue of timely reimbursement. Contractors should not have to wait for up

to a half a year for payment for services rendered. Recommendations to the grantee to solve this problem include: (1) investigation of the reasons for delays of up to six months, (2) resolution of any processing problems internal to the city, and (3) development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for providers for submittal of invoices, including instructions on what constitutes correct information (including correct CHAMP information), the standard time for reimbursement, and types of exceptions to these standard timeframes. All providers must be trained on these SOPs.

### ***Grantee Response***

***Any provider with an executed contract that submits a complete and accurate report to the Grantee can expect to receive reimbursement for services within 6 to 8 weeks. In keeping with Grantee's efforts to streamline the contracting process, we will address the issues which delay the execution of contracts. However, it is important to note that the Grantee staff reviews each report for accuracy before approving payments, in case of inaccuracies, agencies will be notified in a timely manner to correct needed information. Reports that are incomplete or incorrect will not be processed. Delay in signing and/or returning of the purchase order from the vendor will contribute to even longer delay of reimbursement. Service providers who submit an accurate and complete report will receive reimbursement within 6 to 8 weeks.***

***It takes approximately one week for reports to be reviewed and a purchase order requested/received from the city's Finance Department. It takes another week (longer in some cases) for the provider to sign the purchase order. Once the purchase order has been signed, the payment package is forwarded to the City's Finance Department, which then uploads the reimbursement request into the City's electronic archive system (Docushare). This process can take up to a week. Once the payment package has been uploaded, it is forwarded to Accounts Payable for processing. It takes approximately 10 business days for a check to be cut. So even in ideal circumstances, the payment process is at minimum 6 to 7 weeks. The Grantee has identified the need to train providers on the reimbursement process and to inform them of what factors may delay their reimbursement. In October, a workshop will be offered by the Grantee to discuss this issue and other areas of concern identified in this report.***

### **City of Newark Ryan White Unit – Site Visit & Technical Assistance**

#### ***Recommendation***

The grantee should develop standard expectations for Ryan White Unit monitors regarding responding to providers, should provide in-service

training to all monitors, and periodically compare their performance to expectations. This will improve uniformity across all monitors and providers.

***Grantee Response***

***The Grantee will strengthen the training and evaluation components currently used to identify and address deficiencies in monitoring.***

***Recommendation***

With respect to programmatic and fiscal site visits conducted in the past year, the grantee should review its records on the number of actual visits for each provider and compare with provider responses. If there are differences and more visits were conducted, providers should be informed. If the provider responses are correct, then the grantee should review its monitoring practices and provide training to RWU monitors to ensure that they conform to requirements.

***Grantee Response***

***The program monitoring staff of the Grantee office has been reminded of the SOPs regarding site visits and monitoring. An updated SOP manual will be generated to all program monitors to address such issues.***

***Recommendation***

The Grantee should review providers' suggestions for improving monitoring, make adjustments where appropriate, and provide feedback and clarification to providers on the need for current requirements.

***Grantee Response***

***The Grantee will implement quarterly workshops with all service providers throughout the grant year to provide a venue where the Grantee, the service provider and CHAMP staff, can share ideas, communicate concerns and address issues that may arise during the grant year.***

***Recommendation***

It is recommended that EMA-wide provider meetings and teleconferences be more structured to improve outcomes. This means having a clear purpose, an agenda, and time limits.

***Grantee Response***

***The program monitoring staff of the Grantee office has been reminded of the SOPs regarding site visits and monitoring. An updated SOP manual will be generated to all program monitors to address such issues. A routing form will be developed that will require the service provider's signature during each monitoring visit.***

**CHAMP Program**

***Recommendation***

The grantee should review the responses to this section with the CHAMP vendor for comment and development of responses and/or solutions. Solutions should improve utilization and effectiveness of CHAMP EMA-wide due to CHAMP's importance in accurate reporting Ryan White data and thus its role in future federal funding. Suggested topics include but are not limited to (1) current SOPs for technical assistance (help desk) request and response, (2) frequency of training on new features, new staff, update training, etc., (3) reason for slow computers, and (4) recommendations for system improvements, including feasibility of expanded front end report capability. Both should assess the feasibility of regular EMA-wide communication between CHAMP and providers, e.g., by teleconferences, meetings, etc.

***Grantee Response***

***The Grantee will implement quarterly workshops with all service providers throughout the grant year to provide a venue where the Grantee, the service provider and CHAMP staff can share ideas, communicate concerns and address issues that may arise during the grant year.***

***Recommendation***

Address the need for additional CHAMP staff through funding and other mechanisms.

***Grantee Response***

***The Grantee will conduct an assessment of CHAMP to identify mechanisms***

*that can be implemented to improve response time.*