

FY2025 Rural Program NOFO Pre-App Webinar

Rachel Strasinger: Welcome to the Office on Violence Against Women Pre-Application Information Session for the Fiscal Year 2025 Rural Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Program Notice of Funding Opportunity, or NOFO.

This webinar is meant to serve as a source of information regarding the Rural Program application process. It is strongly recommended that you read the full NOFO and follow along today as we reference information and page numbers.

The Office on Violence Against Women or OVW provides federal leadership in developing the national capacity to reduce violence against women and administer justice for and strengthen services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

OVW administers both formula-based and discretionary grant programs, established under the Violence Against Women Act (or VAWA) and subsequent legislation.

To learn more about the work of OVW or to find resources and information for applicants and grantees, please visit the website listed on the slide.

During this webinar we will review what's new with the Rural Program, the NOFO process and key dates, program scope, program eligibility, application information, and application challenges and resources.

The Rural Program supports efforts to enhance the safety of rural victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking through projects uniquely designed to address and prevent these crimes in rural areas.

Last year, the Rural Program made 54 awards totaling more than \$36 million. The Rural Program has two statutory considerations when making awards. The first is that 75 percent of funding must support projects in Rural states. Rural designated states and territories are based on the census. Those states and territories are listed here and on page 12 of the NOFO.

The second statutory consideration is that 35% of Rural Program funds must support services that meaningfully address sexual assault, by which we mean, 75% or more of the proposed goals, objectives, activities, and budget will be focused on responding to sexual assault.

This slide summarizes some changes from last years' NOFO. We will go over these changes in greater detail throughout the presentation, but they include new priorities and out-of-scope activities, a new documentation process for rural eligibility, modifications to the Rural SANE Initiative, and a new, optional, Sample Proposal Narrative template.

Here are some key dates to keep in mind for the FY25 NOFO process. Note that successful submission of an application requires active accounts in SAM.gov, Grants.gov, and JustGrants. The enrollment process can take 2-3 weeks to complete, so please ensure your organization has active accounts in the necessary systems no later than June 17th.

Please also note from the previous slide the two-step submission process in JustGrants and Grants.gov, which you can find additional information about on page 29 of the NOFO.

An application cannot be initiated in JustGrants until the SF-424 has been submitted in Grants.gov, so it is advised that applicants complete that step as soon as possible, but no later than July 8th, 2025, at 11:59 pm. The full application must be submitted in JustGrants no later than July 10th, 2025, at 8:59 pm.

In this next section, we will address Rural Purpose Areas, Strategies, and Priorities. This slide presents an abbreviated overview of Rural Purpose Areas and Strategies. The full text can be found in the NOFO.

All projects must address at least one Purpose Area and one Strategy and must devote at least 70% of their project activities and budget to purpose areas 1, 2, 3(a), which we will discuss momentarily, or 4.

Note the overlap between many of the Purpose Areas and Strategies. Programs should be thoughtful when combining these, ensuring the selected Strategies support and align with relevant Purpose Areas.

A bit of clarification on some nuances for Purpose Area 3 and activities related to prevention generally:

Applicants proposing to address Purpose Area 3 MUST address BOTH 3a and 3b. Additionally, activities related to prevention and awareness in 3b are capped at 30% of the project budget and activities. As mentioned previously, 70% of the project budget and activities must support areas 1, 2, 3a, and 4.

Therefore, a project focused 100% on prevention and awareness would be out of scope for the Rural Program. Please keep this cap in mind when planning your project.

In FY25, applications that substantively address one or more of the new priorities listed here may receive special consideration for funding.

Applicants seeking to address the first or second priorities should be sure to respond to the prompts in question 2 of the Purpose of the Proposal section.

Applicants seeking to address the third priority must submit a letter certifying their compliance with federal immigration law.

Given the limited resources in many rural communities, funding from the Rural Program allows a diverse range of activities and services to support survivors, including, but not limited to, all of the activities listed here.

In our next section, we will discuss activities that are out-of-scope for the Rural Program, activities that compromise victim safety, and unallowable costs. Applications proposing such activities may receive a deduction in points during the review process or may be removed from consideration entirely.

The list of out-of-scope activities for the Rural Program has been updated in FY25, and there is a new requirement to certify compliance with the out-of-scope activities. Please be sure to review the full list of out-of-scope activities on pages 14-15. More information about the required certification can be found on page 25.

In the next few slides, we will dig into a few activities that have caused confusion for applicants in the past.

We previously mentioned the requirement to pair prevention activities with direct responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, as well as the 30% cap on prevention and awareness activities and costs.

Please also note the prohibition on broad scope prevention campaigns and curricula. Content focused on bullying and character-building is out-of-scope and therefore not allowed. Content must be clearly focused on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking.

We have also seen some confusion regarding the allowability of services to children. To clarify, services provided to children are limited to child sexual assault and services provided in the course of serving an adult survivor. Because OVW funds are meant to address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, services related to child abuse and neglect are explicitly out of scope and unallowable.

Addressing family violence is also out-of-scope for the Rural Program. Again, because OVW funds are only meant to address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking – addressing family violence, such as violence between siblings or violence between a parent and child – is out of scope and unallowable.

OVW does not fund activities that jeopardize victim safety, deter or prevent physical or emotional healing for victims, or allow offenders to avoid responsibility for their actions. For a full list of activities that compromise victim safety and recovery, please review the Application Companion Guide on the DOJ website. Page 14 of the NOFO includes a link to this resource.

Here is a list of other unallowable costs for the Rural Program.

In this section, we will discuss Rural Program eligibility requirements.

The following entities are eligible to apply for this program: States and territories, Indian Tribes, Local governments and Nonprofit (public or private) entities, including Tribal nonprofit organizations. For definitions of these entities, please refer to the NOFO.

Applications must include at least one partner and must include a victim service provider as a formal project partner or the lead applicant. Please review the full definition of a victim service provider on page 8 of the NOFO.

Applications must include agencies and organizations necessary to implement the proposed project. These partners may include victim service providers, law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, health care professionals, etc.

All applicants except federally recognized Indian Tribes must demonstrate that the proposed project will serve a rural area or community, regardless of whether the applicant is from a rural-designated state or territory.

For the purpose of the Rural Program, a rural area or community is defined as: any area or community outside of a standard metropolitan statistical area (or MSA), or any area or community that is both within or part of an MSA and located in a rural census tract.

Federally recognized Indian Tribes are statutorily considered rural and so are the only entities exempt from the requirement to document the eligibility of their service area in applications.

Rural Program funds may not be used in any community or service area that does not meet one of these definitions.

In FY25, all applicants except federally recognized Indian Tribes must upload the Rural Eligibility Checklist as an attachment with their application. Instructions to complete the Checklist can be accessed through the link on page 27 of the NOFO, as well as on the DOJ website. No other forms of documentation will be accepted, and OVW will not contact applicants who do not submit this documentation.

The Rural Eligibility Checklist combines the criteria for rural areas and communities into one simple checklist. All areas or communities eligible for funding have already been identified and are labeled as "ELIGIBLE" in the checklist, as shown on this slide.

Applicants will select their state and county, and then check off the eligible areas they propose to serve by placing an "x" in the "Area Served" column, as shown here. The completed checklist should only show the proposed service areas. The Checklist must be uploaded as an attachment to the application in JustGrants. The instructions for the Checklist include a link to a searchable map that will allow applicants to see where a census tract is located.

Finally, applicants proposing to provide legal assistance for victims should carefully review the requirements related to those activities on page 26 and must submit a Delivery of Legal Assistance Certification letter with their application that addresses the items listed on the slide. More information can be found on page 26, and a sample letter is available through a link on page 7.

In the next section, we will discuss types of applications, award period and budget caps, application contents, common challenges, and we will share some tips. There are two types of applications: new and continuation. New applications are those submitted by entities that have never received funding under the Rural Program, or whose previous Rural Program grant award expired on or before July 10, 2024. The second type of application is continuation. Continuation applications are those submitted by entities that have an existing or recently closed (after July 10, 2024) Rural Program grant award. Note that current grantees with a substantial amount of unobligated funds remaining may not be considered for funding or may receive a reduced award amount if selected for funding in FY 2025. In general, grantees are prohibited from having two active awards under the same program. Please review the information on pages 8 and 9 in further detail.

Please note that applying as a continuation grantee does not guarantee ongoing funding. Ongoing funding should not be assumed based on any previous funding received, and continuation applications do not have any advantage over new applications. As with all competitive funding, grantees should have contingency plans in place to assure the continuity of services in the event funds are not awarded.

The grant award period is 36 months. Budgets must reflect 36 months of project activity. We anticipate that the grant award period will start on October 1st, 2025. This program typically makes awards in the range of \$500,000-\$750,000. In FY25, OVW estimates that it will make up to 55 awards for an estimated \$36,000,000.

Funding levels under this program for FY25 are: continuation applications not addressing sexual assault are limited to \$750,000; continuation applications addressing sexual assault are limited to \$950,000; new applications addressing sexual assault are limited to \$700,000; and new applications not addressing sexual assault and SANE Initiative applications are limited to \$500,000 for the entire 36 months.

As a reminder, applications that meaningfully address sexual assault will focus 75% or more of proposed goals, objectives, activities, and budget on responding to sexual assault.

We are now going to briefly discuss the Rural Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner or SANE Initiative, which is meant to enhance quality of care for survivors of sexual assault by supporting the creation of medical forensic exam services in rural communities and increasing the number of trained SANEs. This information is only relevant to applicants proposing to implement NEW SANE activities in their communities. The Rural SANE Initiative is not appropriate for organizations seeking funding for existing SANE services, as those can be funded through a regular Rural Program award. Successful applicants will establish hospital- and/or community-based programs that offer sexual assault medical forensic exams and sexual assault victim services using coordinated community response strategies. Selected sites will have access to specialized technical assistance (TA) providers. OVW anticipates making up to four awards for \$500,000 for 36 months.

Examples of possible project activities for this Initiative include: implementing a new sexual assault medical forensic exam (or SAMFE) or sexual assault nurse examiner (or SANE) program; provision of SAMFE services utilizing a mobile model; establishing partnerships with local hospitals to secure facilities to conduct exams; partnering with or training qualified midwives to perform exams; minimizing barriers to accessing SAMFE services; purchasing equipment, kits, and other items needed to conduct exams; recruiting and providing training to registered nurses to become SANEs; and/or providing ongoing training for SANEs.

For SANE Initiative applicants, partnership requirements include: either the applicant or its partner(s) should be a victim service provider and have a mission that is specific to the provision of sexual assault services, and offer services to address the impact of sexual assault across the lifespan; staff implementing activities must have specialized training in sexual assault; and any sexual assault services outside of the medical forensic exam should be provided by trained victim advocates. Other requirements for the Rural SANE Initiative include: participation in a 9 month planning period with OVW-designated TA providers, required deliverables by the end of the planning period include an MOU and working protocols among partners. Staff implementing activities must also be hired by the end of the planning period.

During the planning period, develop partnerships to ensure a collaborative community response to sexual assault; develop a new SANE program that offers comprehensive sexual assault forensic exams and supportive services for survivors; develop or enhance policies and procedures that align with the Department of Justice's national protocols.

Provided they meet the eligibility criteria, current OVW grantees are eligible to apply for the SANE Initiative. However, please note that in FY 2025, applicants may apply for EITHER the Rural SANE Initiative OR a regular Rural Program award, but not both. Again, SANE activities are allowable under the regular Rural Program, whereas the purpose of the SANE Initiative is to develop and implement NEW SANE activities.

If OVW receives an application for both the regular Rural Program and the SANE Initiative, only the application to the regular Rural Program will be reviewed. Therefore, applicants should think carefully about which request to make. Be sure to indicate in your project title that you are applying for the SANE Initiative.

This slide shows some questions to consider when determining whether to apply for the Rural SANE Initiative or a regular award from the Rural Program. Prospective applicants should think through whether the SANE activities for which they are seeking funding would be new services in their community, whether the funding need is only related to SANE services, and whether 9 months of planning and technical assistance is needed. Requests to support existing SANE activities, pair SANE activities with a range of supportive services to survivors, or projects that do not require a planning period or specialized TA should be made through an application to the regular Rural Program.

Here is a chart summarizing the differences between a Rural SANE Initiative project and a regular award from the Rural Program.

Now we will review the components of the application. Applications consist of the Proposal Narrative, the Budget Detail Worksheet and narrative, the Memorandum of Understanding or Letters of Support ONLY for courts and applicants to the SANE Initiative; and Rural Eligibility Documentation (which, is again, required for all applicants except Indian tribes). The Proposal Narrative, Budget worksheet and narrative, and MOU are scored during peer review out of 100 points total. Applications missing one or more of these components may be removed from further consideration.

The proposal narrative is worth 70 points and includes: the Purpose of the proposal section; the What will be done section; and the Who will implement section. New this year is the option to complete the Sample Proposal Narrative, which allows for responses to each narrative prompt to be answered in a worksheet format. Applicants still have the option to complete the standard proposal narrative. Applicants must choose to complete either the standard narrative or the sample; a combination of responses in both formats is not allowed. The Proposal Narrative must be uploaded as an attachment in JustGrants.

Here is an example of what the Sample Proposal Narrative looks like. The Sample Proposal Narrative can be downloaded from the OVW website and is included as Appendix C in the NOFO.

Most applicants are required to submit an MOU, but in a few limited circumstances, an LOS may be submitted instead. We will discuss those exceptions on the next slide. The MOU is a document containing the terms of the partnership and the roles and responsibilities between two or more parties. It must be a single document and must be signed and dated by the Authorized Representative of each proposed partner organization. OVW will accept electronic signatures. Missing signatures may result in a point deduction or removal from consideration, particularly if the MOU is missing the signature of a required partner. The MOU may include multiple signature pages as long as each page includes the names, titles, and date for all signatories to the MOU.

Letters of Support will only be accepted in lieu of an MOU under the following circumstances: the lead applicant is a state, Tribal, territory, or local court and cannot enter into an MOU; a state, Tribal, territory, or local court is a project partner (not the lead applicant) and cannot enter into an MOU; or the applicant is applying to the SANE Initiative.

Budgets and budget narratives will be submitted as attachments. All budgets should include the required OVW Training and Technical Assistance set aside, which is \$10,000 for applicants from the 48 contiguous states and \$15,000 for applicants from the territories, Hawaii, and Alaska. All budgets should include adequate funds to address language access and accessibility needs. If you have other resources to cover the cost of these services, please note that in your budget. All project partners should be fairly compensated for their contributions.

Pages 30-31 include an application submission checklist that clarifies which items are submitted in which system, as well as whether the item is submitted as an attachment or online form. Note that the new requirement to certify compliance with out-of-scope activities applies to all grantees. Please see page 25 of the NOFO for additional information on this requirement.

The next couple of slides will highlight certain aspects of the pre-award risk assessment and provide you with a link to a detailed webinar on how to develop the budget that will be included in your application. First, we'll highlight the Single Audit response and the IRS three step safe harbor procedure in the Summary Data Sheet, which is completed by all applicants.

OVW requests that all applicants provide a statement as to whether they have expended \$750,000 or more in federal funds during their last fiscal year. If they have, then they indicate that and also specify the end date of their last fiscal year. Please ensure that this question is answered in its entirety on the Summary Data Sheet in Question 3.

Another item that we'd like to highlight from the NOFO is specifically for non profit organizations. If you use the IRS three step safe harbor procedure to determine your executives' compensation, you are required to provide a disclosure letter. Please refer to the NOFO for further details and a link to a sample letter. Note that there are 4 required parts of this disclosure letter. The sample letter provided outlines all 4 parts of the disclosure, so please be sure to follow the sample and provide a response to each of the four pieces.

The next item that we'd like to discuss is the pre-award risk assessment questions, which assist the Grants Financial Management Division or GFMD in their pre award risk assessment for all applications. Each applicant must prepare a response to all 11 questions, and each question has multiple parts.

Some of the most common issues that we've encountered have been, for example, question 2, where the applicant indicates that they do indeed have internal policies, but they don't provide a brief list of topics covered in the policies and procedures. In question 3, some applicants fail to provide a brief summary of the organization's process for tracking expenditures, and specifically whether or not it tracks budgeted versus actual expenditures.

These are just a few examples, but in general, please make sure that you read each piece of each question and provide a full and comprehensive response.

This slide highlights some resources that are available as you're creating the budget to be submitted with your application, including training resources and budget sample worksheets. A detailed webinar presentation is also available on how to develop a budget for OVW applications. This webinar addresses some of the challenges that you may face with your budgets and provides insight on OVW's budget review process. The webinar can be found at the link on this slide.

Next up is the uniform guidance, which can be found at 2 CFR 200. Other resources include the DOJ Financial Guide and the NOFO itself. We know this can be a lot of information to process, so if you have any questions about the GFMD information discussed, please feel free to contact the GFMD helpdesk by phone or email.

Now we will go over some common application challenges, which include: not reading the NOFO to understand eligibility, service area, or partnership requirements, not allowing enough time to complete registration or activate accounts in Grants.gov, SAM.gov, and JustGrants; failing to submit rural eligibility documentation or submitting incorrect documentation. JustGrants will not prevent you from submitting an application that is missing the required documentation, and OVW will not contact applicants for missing documentation.

Additional challenges include: ignoring the formatting requirements on p. 16 of the NOFO; failing to use headings from the NOFO in the proposal narrative; exceeding the 20-page limit on the proposal narrative; and failing to submit a 36-month grant budget.

Common challenges we see with MOUs include: not leaving enough time to coordinate signatures; submitting an LOS when an MOU is required; including unnecessary partnerships that do not support the project described in the application; submitting multiple MOUs or MOUs developed for other projects, other funding sources, or previous award cycles. Applicants are required to submit one comprehensive MOU that is specific to the OVW Rural project and year for which funds are being requested. Points may be deducted for MOUs that do not meet the criteria detailed in the NOFO.

As mentioned previously, there are several helpful resources available to you on our website. You will find the NOFO companion guide, sample budgets, sample MOUs, tips and examples, and much more! Please review and use these resources. They are there to help you! You can find additional resources on submitting the application in JustGrants, including enrolling users, on the JustGrants training website.

Please make note of the relevant contacts for this process. The OVW Rural Unit is available to respond to questions about the NOFO or the Rural Program. For financial questions, please reach out to our Grants Financial Management Division. If you encounter issues with completing specific tasks in SAM.gov, Grants.gov, or JustGrants, please note that you will generally get the quickest resolution by reaching out to the relevant contact for that specific system directly.

Thank you for your interest in the FY25 Rural Program NOFO. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us via the Rural Inbox with questions.