



Freedom Network USA

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VIA EMAIL

RE: FY2025 OVC Human Trafficking Funding Recommendations

Director Rose:

Freedom Network USA (FNUSA) thanks **OVC** for continuing to provide critical funding for human trafficking service providers. These services are life-saving for survivors fleeing exploitation and allow survivors to build a safe future for themselves and their families. We appreciate your office's dedication to administering these funds effectively and the hard work of your team. We also appreciate the improvements you have implemented in the past few years to increase and improve access to trauma-informed services for all survivors and integrate lived experience engagement into grant programs.

As you know, FNUSA is the nation's largest coalition of service providers and advocates working directly with human trafficking survivors in the United States. We are committed to the human rights-based approach to human trafficking, placing a trafficked person's priorities and narrative at the center of anti-trafficking work. We work to create a coordinated national system in which appropriate and effective high-quality services are available to any survivor, anywhere, anytime—regardless of immigration status, geographic location, age, gender, sexual orientation, or type of trafficking experienced. On behalf of our 101 [members](#) across the US, I respectfully submit the following recommendations for your program planning in the coming months and years:

1. Ensure Grant Applications are Accessible and Provide Applicants with Effective Technical Assistance

Applications for federal grants are time-intensive, and many grantees, including grassroots and culturally specific organizations, do not have in-house grant writing experience. FNUSA members report that the staff at **OVC**-hosted office hours and application webinars during the solicitation period are unable to answer applicant's questions and the information provided does not expand upon the written solicitations. As **OVC** expands opportunities to include the involvement of people with lived experience and newer organizations, staff should be able to answer questions in a timely manner.

While the staggered deadlines for FY24 solicitations allowed organizations more time to complete effective applications, the staggered posting of solicitations made it difficult for applicants to determine which grants to apply for, as they were not sure if more pertinent grants would be released later in the cycle.

We commend the addition of a requirement to provide culturally specific services under the Preventing Trafficking of Girls grant. Requiring 40% of the budget to be set aside for partner organizations is a significant step toward ensuring culturally specific organizations are involved in service provision and are compensated appropriately.

We greatly appreciate **OVC**'s efforts to improve the fellowship application so it is more accessible to experts with lived experience, including adding a separate information session for the fellowship opportunity. While many experts with lived experience were enthusiastic about the fellowship opportunity, they were unable to apply because the funding available was insufficient to complete the projects in the designated time frame.

Therefore, FNUSA recommends the following:

- a. Continue to provide a separate information session for all fellowship solicitations. Ensure staff are prepared to answer questions about the process from first-time applicants.
- b. Update the fellowship solicitation to provide more clarity about the application and grant requirements by:
 - a. Removing references to SAM registration since the SAM system is not used by Fellowship applicants.
 - b. Removing references to the PMT as the platform is not designed for the fellowship and fellows should only provide reports to JustGrants.
- c. Host a listening session with lived experience experts for feedback on the fellowship budgets.
- d. Continue to release human trafficking grant solicitations with staggered deadlines, so potential grantees applying for multiple grants have sufficient time to complete all applications. Provide a list of all solicitations that would be posted throughout the grant cycle at the beginning of the cycle so applicants can plan accordingly.
- e. Announce grant awards at least two months before the grant's start date. This allows grantees to plan for a transition period between awards or to prepare for the end of a program.
- f. Require a plan for the involvement of impacted communities and individuals with lived experience in all grant solicitations, including steps taken to protect the confidentiality of experts. Applicants were encouraged to propose a plan for the involvement of individuals with lived experience in all solicitations for FY24 except for the Preventing Trafficking of Girls grant. Requiring a plan for lived experience and impacted community engagement is crucial to ensuring *all* programs are effectively engaging survivors and providing space for them to lead projects. When multiple partners are involved in administering a grant, the plan should include specific actions for each.

2. Support Grantees with Consistent and Clear Grant Management Practices

OVC should provide grantees with sufficient and timely information so they can best implement grant requirements. Many anti-trafficking organizations have been operating for less than 10 years, experience high turnover, or are new to federal grant management. All grantees require more direct communication with grant managers and more effective assistance from **OVC** to be able to meet all grant requirements. FNUSA members continue to report issues with the reliability and time-consuming nature of grant management software.

Therefore, FNUSA recommends the following:

- a. Require grant managers to meet one-on-one with their assigned grantees within the first month of the grant period to discuss the process for deadlines, outcomes, and budget adjustments. Alert grantees via email when a new grant manager is assigned and provide an opportunity to meet the new manager within one month.
- b. Also, when grantees hire new program managers, require grant managers to meet with new grantee staff within their first month to ensure a smooth transition.
- c. Consolidate grants from the same agency to the same grant manager. If an agency has multiple grants from **OVC**, for example, the same grant manager should be assigned to all of those grants. This allows the grant manager to develop a better understanding of the grantee and ensures consistent oversight.
- d. Host standing monthly office hours with a grant monitor where grantees can get direct assistance. Allow all OVC human trafficking grantees to 'drop in' for immediate assistance and responses.
- e. Develop and share guidance on grant administration, including templates for common requests, definitions of terms (such as "key personnel"), and expected timelines for approval by grant managers (for publications or other materials).
- f. Establish a mechanism for anonymously reporting inconsistencies or challenges with grant managers, with clear guidance explaining who receives this information and how it will be addressed.
- g. Host a listening session with grantees about the PMT and JustGrants and start a process to revise the platforms based on feedback. Grantees struggle with the substantial time commitment to update the platforms, redundancy in reporting requirements for both platforms, and a lack of data collection that is relevant to their work and impact.
- h. Continue to host some grantee meetings to address common, practical issues of grant management. In-person sessions are helpful for grantees to meet with OVC staff, but virtual opportunities should continue to provide multiple avenues for engagement and promote accessibility. Grantee meetings should primarily focus on substantive content. Since grantees provide a wide range of services, specialized break-out sessions would provide grantees with space to have productive conversations about their specific field. TTA grantees would benefit from speaking with each other about common challenges and solutions. Service providers would benefit from sharing creative solutions to challenges in their specific field.
- i. Important information about grant management shared during virtual or in-person meetings should also be provided in written format to all grantees so that those who cannot attend can also receive it.

- j. Publish a joint list of federally-funded service providers, including **OVC** grantees, **OTIP** grantees, and **TVAP/Aspire** subrecipients; including contact details for referrals, demographics served, and types of services provided.
- k. **OVC** and **OTIP** should coordinate joint training for all grantees on compliance with civil rights requirements, including increasing accessibility in outreach, education, and service provision.

3. Provide Updated and Comprehensive Training and Technical Assistance on Grant Management

Both TTA experts participating in and recipients of the Survivor Engagement Training and Technical Assistance (SETTA) report positive experiences with the program. We commend **OVC's** efforts to train grantees on effective engagement with lived experience experts and prioritization of equitable pay. We urge **OVC** to continue to fund and expand the SETTA program.

Anti-trafficking organizations face significant turnover of staff and require more consistent training and technical assistance on grant management to meet **OVC** grant requirements. Many organizations do not have federal grant experience and spend a significant amount of time trying to learn grant management skills on their own. FNUSA members report feeling unprepared to handle complex grant reporting requirements or budget creation and maintenance.

Therefore, FNUSA recommends the following:

- a. Provide increased training and support for **OVC** grantees on:
 - o Program development and management, including developing a new project and scaling a small project.
 - o Grant management, including budget management and grant procedures.
 - o Grant reporting processes, including ensuring grantees know the correct information to submit.
 - o Trauma-informed workplace policies and procedures for trauma survivors in the workplace and for addressing vicarious trauma.
- b. Coordinate with **OVW** to provide TA to all grantees on language access issues, including language access minimum requirements, interpreter and translator qualifications, interpreter and translator ethics, best practices in working with interpreters and translators, and budgeting for language services.
- c. Provide more training, support, and flexibility around the match requirements. Match requirements are complicated, especially as programs are still rebuilding due to the pandemic. **OVC** should provide additional training and technical assistance on meeting match requirements, including examples of a diverse array of match sources, sample documentation, and a clear process for approval of in-kind rates that are above the contractor limit. When the market rate cannot be approved by **OVC**, approvals should be considered for a portion of the market rate.
- d. Ensure TTA grantees can effectively provide TTA to both newer and more experienced service providers. Since OVC funds organizations building capacity and organizations

that have been operating for many years, it is crucial that the TTA provided is adaptable to providers' varying needs.

- e. Continue to support Training and Technical Assistance grants, including TTA on:
 - o Survivor-centered social services, including comprehensive case management and counseling.
 - o Addressing barriers to truly inclusive services and supporting clients with intersecting marginalized identities. While **OVC**-funded services have become more inclusive, survivors still report providers are unable or unwilling to effectively provide services to transgender and gender-diverse survivors, disabled survivors, and survivors with intersecting marginalized identities.
 - o Supporting survivor engagement and effectively engaging with lived experience experts.

4. Support Comprehensive Programs with Trauma-Informed Service Provision

FNUSA appreciates **OVC's** introduction of a pilot program to build the capacity of community-based organizations in underserved communities, which historically have not received significant federal funding. These organizations have deep ties to their communities and are in the best position to identify their communities' needs. In addition, the new priority area for inclusive outreach presents a positive step forward in effective engagement with impacted communities.

OVC should take the lead in supporting trauma-informed, client-centered, voluntary programs that include flexibility in the intensity and length of service provision, low barrier program entry, support for both direct victims and their immediate family members, comprehensive services that include sufficient funding for social and legal services, appropriate service provider staffing and training, and demonstrated language access policies.

There continue to be stark differences between the program funding and guidelines issued by **OVC** and **OTIP**. For survivors, this can be extremely confusing and distressing when the level and type of services provided change dramatically when they, for example, achieve Certification or move to a different city or state. We strongly recommend that **OVC** and **OTIP** develop consistent programs and guidance to create more parity in the services available to survivors.

Therefore, FNUSA recommends the following:

- a. Continue to require all grantees to submit their policies and procedures for service provision to a federally-funded training and technical assistance provider for review and feedback to ensure that policies are trauma-informed and client-centered.
- b. Require all direct services grant budgets to include line items for a comprehensive array of needs (including food, housing, medical care, personal care items, and transportation). Even when partners are identified, there will be needs that are not met by available partners, and all providers must be prepared to budget for these expenses.
- c. Continue to prioritize grants that include outreach plans to ensure collaboration with community-based organizations from the most impacted communities in their

jurisdiction, as they are most likely to identify potential trafficking survivors. Require budget line items to support these community partners.

- d. Grant programs should also be aligned to ensure that services are available when community outreach is funded. Therefore, outreach proposals should include a plan for providing services to identified survivors through other funding sources or partnerships.
- e. Provide specialized funding for Foreign National Minors. Providers continue to report a steady influx of foreign national minors who have experienced labor and/or sex trafficking. Specialized providers are needed to navigate the complex multi-system involvement of these survivors, including the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors program, child welfare systems, criminal legal systems, immigration systems, and school systems.
- f. Support the use of multiple funding sources to meet the needs of all survivors. Grantees should be able to use funding from both **OVC** and **OTIP** as long as they are meeting the objectives of both funding sources. When providers exceed the maximum number of survivors they agreed to serve with one grant, they should be allowed to use another funding source to serve additional survivors, for example, without specific approval from their grant managers.
- g. Support and require increased collaboration between human trafficking service providers, **HUD** CoCs (Continuums of Care), and local housing authorities by:
 - o Connecting providers with rapid rehousing providers funded by HUD.
 - o Providing mandatory TTA for all HT grantees on housing topics, including understanding and accessing mainstream housing programs, collaborating with CoCs, partnering with culturally specific and non-specific organizations, and developing relationships with landlords.
 - o Host regional, joint training sessions with **OTIP** and **HUD** to support collaboration and problem-solving to address the persistent challenges faced by trafficking survivors in finding and maintaining safe housing.
- h. Consider populations served when making grant awards. Priority should be given to programs that can demonstrate their success in serving men and boys, survivors with disabilities, labor trafficking survivors, and LGBTQIA populations.
- i. Provide an external complaint process for reporting **OVC**-funded service providers who violate grant guidance or do not meet grant requirements. While audits are crucial tools for examining issues reported by clients, former clients and other individuals require a separate process to ensure **OVC** is made aware of issues with grantees.

5. Discontinue the role of Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in the Enhanced Collaborative Model or Drastically Increase Oversight and Accountability for LEAs

FNUSA has worked with **OVC** leadership throughout the lifespan of the ECM, and was hopeful that supporting these LEA-service provider collaborations would build lasting partnerships that would increase the identification of survivors and their access to services. However, after decades of funding, these outcomes remain elusive. As a reminder, the purpose of the funding authorization that supports **OJP**'s grantmaking is "to develop, expand, or strengthen victim service programs for victims of human trafficking." 22 USC 7105(b)(2).

FNUSA has found that, regardless of the intention and support provided, the ECMs are not operating as an integrated coalition. They are not identifying and serving the same survivors. Some LEAs refuse to share information and resources with the service providers. Some LEAs engage in 'john' stings and internet operations designed to arrest sex buyers without ever identifying trafficking survivors or those abusing or exploiting actual humans. Survivors are being arrested or threatened with arrest by ECM-funded LEAs. Prosecutors in ECM Task Forces coerce the testimony of survivors by threatening prosecution or refusing to reduce sentencing recommendations. ECM Task Force members refuse to apply for Continued Presence or to provide T Visa Supplement B Certifications for foreign national survivors.

These operations are not accomplishing the objectives of the authorization, are not effective investments, and divert funds that could be used to better address the vast unmet needs of actual human trafficking survivors and the providers who are supporting them.

FNUSA, therefore, recommends that OVC/OJP discontinue the LEA funding within the ECM grant program and redirect that funding to direct victim services.

If OVC/OJP continues to fund the ECM grant program, they should:

- a. Allow **ECM grants** to develop comprehensive community collaborations *instead of* law enforcement-service provider collaborations.
- b. Purpose Area One grants should continue to support developing collaborations and building the capacity of the partners to address human trafficking. These awards should be smaller, perhaps \$500,000 for an initial 3-year award with an optional non-competitive continuation award for programs that meet initial benchmarks of progress. They should also include targeted technical assistance and mentoring. Funding should be shared with all of the community partners, and they should reflect demographic groups in their locality most at risk of trafficking. This allows an initial investment that is manageable for smaller organizations or collaborations, and enables the support of more programs. Not all will be successful, but a smaller initial investment makes space for more communities to experiment and determine what is successful for their circumstance.
- c. Purpose Area Two and Three grants should continue to support local communities and Tribal communities with developed collaborations, ongoing training for partners and community organizations, significant direct outreach efforts designed to identify survivors, and comprehensive social and legal services for all trafficking survivors in a defined geographical area. These awards would be typical, competitive, 3-year awards of at least \$750,000, and applicants could continue to apply for awards.

If OVC/OJP continues to fund LEAs, they must include the following changes through Special Conditions:

- a. Require implementation of written policies and procedures to ensure that trafficking survivors are not arrested or threatened with arrest and are not mandated into services by any task force members.
- b. Continue to require that ECM grantees cannot use **OVC** funds on activities designed

solely to charge and/or prosecute cases with no victims, that result in arrests of potential victims, nor conduct outreach that has not proven successful at identifying survivors.

- c. Require all LEAs to submit an enforceable agency policy that bans sexual contact by employees acting under color of law. No agencies that permit sexual contact during law enforcement actions should receive anti-trafficking grant funds.
- d. Diversion courts and similar approaches that are predicated on the arrest of the crime victim should be explicitly unallowable with these grant funds. Only trauma-informed, voluntary services should be supported by **OVC/OJP**.
- e. Require all ECM grant budgets to reserve at least 60% of the funds for the victim service provider.
- f. All ECM grants should require joint performance reports that enable **OJP** (or the ECM TTA provider) to ensure that all enforcement actions were designed to identify victims, victims were not charged or threatened with arrest, LEAs are working in collaboration with their service provider partners, and survivors are provided with the full range of services and protections they need. Reports should include:
 - All citations and charges resulting from funded law enforcement activities.
 - Detail of how and when service provider partners were included in the planning and execution of all law enforcement activities.
 - Comparison of the service provider and LEA data including:
 - i. Total reports of potential trafficking victims received (disaggregated by type of trafficking (labor or sex), gender of victim, and citizenship status of victim)
 - ii. For each reported victim the status of investigation (if the victim was arrested, incarcerated, prosecuted, and/or sentenced, if so, for what and why) and service provision (if services are open, closed, or never opened, and why)
 - iii. For each reported foreign national victim, the status of the Continued Presence application and I-914 Supplement B
 - iv. An explanation of any differences in victims being identified by the LEA and served by the victim service provider.
- g. All TTA provided by **DOJ** for ECM grantees should include both law enforcement and service provider presenters. TTA should not be separately provided to law enforcement grantees.

6. Vary Grant Award Levels to More Equitably Distribute Funds

We recognize that the current appropriations are simply insufficient to meet all of the needs of all trafficking survivors in the US. We also know that survivors are more likely to be identified (although not necessarily more likely to be trafficked) in urban areas with a concentration of service providers, law enforcement, and community members who have received training to identify human trafficking. However, we also note that needs exist in all states, that providing services in rural areas can be more expensive (per person) than in urban areas with public transportation and publicly financed services, and that limited grant funds must be divided as equitably as possible.

We commend **OVC's** integration of varied funding levels into their grant programs and programs targeted at improving service access in rural areas. Grants should give larger or more established programs the resources needed to support their large caseloads and give smaller and newer programs the stability needed to build their expertise.

Therefore, FNUSA recommends the following:

- a. Grant award amounts should continue to be tiered, providing less funding to new and small programs.
- b. The “Developing Capacity to Serve Human Trafficking Victims” Purpose Area of the Services for Victims of Human Trafficking grant should include varying levels of funding between \$50,000-\$200,000 a year based on the needs of grantees. This provides the stability a program needs to develop, without the federal government making a large investment in an unproven organization or giving unnecessarily large grants to programs that provide vital services to a small number of people.
- c. All grant applicants should be required to specify the service area, the list of services to be provided, and the maximum number of survivors they will be able to serve with each grant. This will ensure programs receive proportionate funding, allow partners in the same area to distinguish their services, and increase accountability. This also allows programs to seek complementary funding from multiple sources to support comprehensive services for diverse populations, large caseloads, or multiple service areas.

7. Collaborate to Fund a Field-Driven National Resource Center

As new providers emerge, and existing programs expand their services, more support is needed to ensure that programs are effective. A National Human Trafficking Resource Center is a critical investment in proactive training and technical assistance. The domestic and sexual violence fields have invested in national training and technical assistance to support the development of high-quality services, standards for evaluation and research, and to build a more collaborative environment for providers.

FNUSA recommends the following to address these needs:

- a. **OVC** and **OTIP** should collaborate to establish at least one national resource center, that is field-driven, connected to direct service providers, staffed by those with direct services, lived, and program development experience, and an understanding of federal grant funding.
- b. The Center could serve as a central distribution point for all federal training materials, including webinars, posters, videos, and other materials.
- c. The Center should provide extensive, proactive training and technical assistance to all grantees to ensure that voluntary, victim-centered, non-discriminatory services are being provided with federal funds.

8. Research, Data and Evaluation

We commend **OVC**'s commitment to research, data, and evaluation. We encourage you to continue collaborating with **NIJ** and **OPRE** to support research that has a real and immediate impact on the improved understanding of human trafficking and the delivery of effective, appropriate services. The research should focus on supporting better identification of survivors, establishing more effective services, and improving outreach and identification of survivors.

Therefore, FNUSA recommends the following to address these needs:

- a. All research grants should be required to provide guidance on how to put the research into practice, which is developed in coordination with a service provider.
- b. Require that research grants include paid consultants with lived experience to guide the design, implementation, analysis, and application of the research.
- c. Better align the data collection requirements for **OVC** and **OTIP** funds. When providers collect the same types of data for both programs, the process is easier for them, and the data analysis is more meaningful for the nation.
- d. Develop joint **OVC** and **OTIP** guidance on program evaluation to support grantees in engaging in meaningful evaluation that is useful for both the grantees and the government—including community needs assessments, and both process and outcome evaluations. Grant solicitations should clearly state if research and/or evaluations are required and if a minimum amount of grant funds must be budgeted for that purpose.

We look forward to discussing these recommendations with you and working collaboratively with **OVC** as you work to further strengthen and expand your human trafficking victim services.

Sincerely,



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