

**NYS Department of State
NY State Office for New Americans
ESOL Opportunity Center**

Request for Applications # 20-ONA-26 Questions & Answers

The responses to questions included herein are the official responses by the State to questions submitted by potential applicants and are hereby incorporated into RFA # 20-ONA-26 issued on March 8, 2021. In the event of any conflict between the RFA and these responses, the requirements or information contained in these responses will prevail.

Section IV Scope of Services is hereby amended to read:

1. Overview

This RFA seeks approximately 21 not-for-profit organizations capable of hosting an ONA Opportunity Center - ESOL at a physical location within the service area for which the organization is applying or remotely. Each ONA Opportunity Center - ESOL that provides in person services will have a designated space -which will be designated by branded signage. Each ONA Opportunity Center - ESOL will provide the following services, including:

- a. English Language Training
- b. Workforce Assistance
- c. Referrals to the ONA Hotline

All services provided under this grant must be offered free of charge to clients. This includes books and other instructional materials.

The counties in which DOS/ONA proposes to make awards and the number of awards per county is outlined in Appendix A.

2. English Language Training

Overview

Every new American who wants to learn English should have the opportunity to do so. New Americans contribute greatly to the State's dynamic cultural and economic environment, but their participation in our society may be limited due to limited language proficiency. Today, there are about one million New Yorkers who have Limited English Proficiency ("LEP"). Providing access to ESOL training throughout the State is vital to facilitate the full participation of new Americans in New York's civic and economic life.

ESOL training under this grant may only be offered for adult education purposes (18 and older).

Instruction and Programing

Each ONA Opportunity Center – ESOL will run English language classes quarterly, and provide instruction at a variety of levels, with classes scheduled to best accommodate the diverse work schedules of the new American communities by offering day, night, and weekend classes.

Each Center will be required to provide 75 hours of ESOL training to each client per quarter, of which 50 hours at a minimum should be dedicated to teacher-led instruction, either in person or through live in person instruction via an online platform. If instruction is done via an online platform, classes must be synchronous, with opportunities for

students to communicate face to face with the instructor in real time. All grantees conducting remote classes must adhere to New York IT policies regarding accessibility of information communication technology.¹

The remaining hours may be achieved through documented time spent on mobile learning such as Cell-Ed or one-on-one tutoring, in computer labs, and/or conversation hours.

ONA Opportunity Centers - ESOL will be required to offer at a minimum, a pre-literate/beginner, intermediate, and advanced level course each quarter however, based on student testing the grantee can apply for a waiver from ONA to readjust classes offered. Each class must provide English language learners with the ability to achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of the English language. Class topics must incorporate skills to allow participants to participate in the workplace and be fully engaged in the community. Classes that are solely to prepare students for the Citizenship exam are not permitted.

All classes, whether taught in person or via online platform, must be led by a paid qualified instructor. Volunteers may also be used to assist with instruction as needed. The minimum qualifications for both paid and volunteer ESOL instructors under this grant are a certificate in teaching ESOL, such as CELTA, and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL teaching experience. In addition, for ASL instructors teaching both ESOL and ASL students, the instructor must have either Provisional or Qualified and Professional certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source. If a supplemental instructor is only teaching an AASL class, that individual does not need the CELTA and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL teaching experience. Opportunity Centers may repurpose existing staff members for the ESOL instructor position as long as they meet the minimum qualifications. Grantees must submit documentation supporting the certification/teaching experience of their ESOL instructors at the time of contract negotiation and retain such documentation throughout the duration of the grant.

If offered in person, classes should be offered in locations that are easily accessible to clients by public transportation, and that are located within communities that have a significant population of new Americans (see Appendix A).

Registration

ONA Opportunity Centers - ESOL classes are expected to run on a quarterly basis, enrolling a minimum of 40-60 clients across the different classes. Opportunity Centers - ESOL will be required to register a minimum of 60 clients across the different classes in three out of four quarters each year. In the other quarter, the registration requirement will be a minimum of 40 registered clients across the different classes, for a total of 220 students per year.

For example:

- An Opportunity Center – ESOL may find that a significant number of clients do not attend classes in the winter due to the holiday season and may structure the program as such: in Q1 (October- December) - 60 clients, Q2 (January-March) – 40 clients, Q3 (April-June) – 60 clients, and Q4 (July- September) – 60 clients.
- An Opportunity Center - ESOL may find that a significant number of clients work in the summer and may structure the program as such: in Q1 (October-December) -60 clients, Q2 (January-March) – 60 clients, Q3 (April-June) – 60 clients, and Q4 (July-September) – 40 clients

¹ https://its.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/nys-p08-005_accessibility_of_information_communication_technology_1.pdf

Registration of clients will be required to have been accomplished by the second week of the quarter. If an organization fails to do so, they may be subject to corrective action. **Clients who receive the 75 hours of ESOL training (as described above) may be counted anew for the following quarter if they want to continue ESOL studies.** For example, a client completing the required classes in Q1, Q2 and Q4 would count as three clients, one per quarter where they have met the target goal.

Grantees must ensure that a minimum of 70 percent of the registered cohort in a quarter complete a minimum of 75 hours of instruction per quarter.

ESOL Participant Assessment

Initial client assessment should take place at the time of registration to determine the competency level in English or American Sign Language (ASL). Additionally, all clients will be tested at the end of each quarter.

Client assessments and post-testing should be accomplished with the standard assessment instruments approved by ONA. Some instruments may include but are not limited to the Test of Adult Basic Education (“TABE”); the BEST Plus (computer or print-based); and/or the BEST Literacy.

Volunteers

Opportunity Centers - ESOL are strongly encouraged to recruit, train and incorporate community volunteers to support ESOL programming. Applicants proposing to use volunteers will receive additional points in the evaluation. These community volunteers may assist paid instructors with English classroom instruction, assist with supplemental activities including one-on-one tutoring, conversation groups, assist with workforce workshops, provide administrative support, assist with client registration, and provide outreach assistance for the ESOL program. The minimum qualifications for volunteer ESOL instructors under this grant are a certificate in teaching ESOL, such as CELTA, and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL teaching experience. In addition, for ASL instructors teaching both ESOL and ASL students, the instructor must have either Provisional or Qualified and Professional certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source. If a supplemental instructor is only teaching an ASL class, that individual does not need the CELTA and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL teaching experience.

Training of volunteers will be required to be documented and such documentation should be made available at ONA’s request. Volunteers are required to maintain client confidentiality at all times. Opportunity Centers - ESOL must track volunteer hours, services provided, and report said hours and services to ONA.

3. Workforce Assistance

Overview

The Workforce Assistance provided by the Opportunity Center- ESOL will help New York’s low-income immigrant population fully utilize their potential. This program will allow ESOL students the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge that will prepare them to successfully participate in the workforce. This program will ultimately help grow the state’s economy, thus building upon Governor Cuomo’s ongoing commitment to immigrant empowerment and workforce development.

Programming

Individual guidance on resume building, interview techniques and employment opportunities must be offered to all clients who demonstrate a need or interest who attend ESOL programs funded under this grant. Such support can be provided with ONA assistance through collaborations with available state/local employment service providers and/or available Cell-Ed resources including its WorkReady Suite of programs which offers remote training in essential work skills, career coaching, and job placement.

Additionally, ONA Opportunity Centers - ESOL are required to hold a minimum of 10 workshops a year on workforce topics. Topics may include, but are not limited to, resume writing, interviewing, and sector specific job trainings. Workshops can either be offered in person or through an online platform. All workshops must be approved by ONA prior to being held.

4. ONA Hotline

Each ONA Opportunity Center - ESOL will refer clients to the Office for New Americans' multi-lingual, toll-free immigration assistance hotline, which responds to general questions about immigration and naturalization benefits, requirements and procedures.

ONA Opportunity Centers - ESOL are required to share contact information and class schedules with the ONA hotline.

Section V FUNDING is hereby amended to read:

Eligible Expenses

1. The use of funds must conform to the authorized purposes of the Community Services Block Grant Act, 42 USC § 9901 et seq..
2. The use of funds must comply with the Terms and Conditions of the Community Services Block Grant award.
3. The use of funds must comply with all applicable federal uniform administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements, 45 C.F.R. 75.
4. Grant funds may only be used to support activities delineated in the program scope of this RFA.
5. The federal poverty line must be used as a criterion of eligibility for program participants. 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines must be used to determine eligibility after September 30, 2021. The applicable poverty line to be used will be set forth in DOS's CSBG State Plan or program memoranda which will be provided to grantees.
- ~~6.~~ All ESOL classes must be taught by a paid instructor. Organizations may hire a per-diem instructor to teach either ESOL or ASL classes.
- ~~6-7.~~ Costs to develop materials to serve individuals with disabilities.
- ~~7-8.~~ Personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and staff necessary for safety of in person classes.
- ~~8-9.~~ Organizations can apply a federally approved indirect cost rate or a 10% de minimis rate towards this grant. If any organization elects not to use either of these rates, the organization may use a direct allocation to document administrative costs. Organizations using the direction allocation method must submit a detailed cost allocation plan documenting the methodologies to be used to allocate costs to this grant with their application. Administrative Expenses are those expenses authorized and allowable pursuant to applicable agency regulations, contracts or other rules that govern reimbursement with Federal funds or State-authorized payments that are incurred in connection with the covered provider's overall management and necessary overhead that cannot be attributed directly to the provision of program services. Please note that the grantee must retain backup documentation detailing how administrative funds were spent. This back up must be made available for review by DOS personnel upon request.

Section VII APPLICATION SUBMISSION 3. is hereby amended to read:

II. **Capacity**

- c. For applicants that anticipate employing a new ESOL instructor and/or a new ASL instructor, describe plans to recruit an instructor that meets the basic requirements of an ESOL instructor (CELTRA and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL experience) and/or an ASL instructor (Provisional or Qualified and Professional

certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source.) including a sample of the job description, or for applicants that anticipate repurposing an ESOL or ASL instructor already employed at the organization, demonstrate that this instructor meets the basic requirements of (i) an ESOL instructor including CELTRA, and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL experience and/or (ii) an ASL instructor (Provisional or Qualified and Professional certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source.) This should be submitted with the application as **Attachment 7: ONA ESOL Instructor Qualifications.**

Section VII APPLICATION SUBMISSION 4. is hereby amended to read:

a. ESOL

- iii. Describe the number and types of classes offered (beginning, intermediate, ~~and~~-advanced, and any ASL classes). Describe proposed class schedule each quarter, including times held, and describe how this schedule will meet the needs of new Americans in the region proposed.

Section IX EVALUATION SECTION b. is hereby amended to read:

b. Capacity -30 points

iii. Applicant proposed employing an ESOL instructor and/or an ASL instructor and fully described plans to recruit this instructor, including a sample of the job description which successfully demonstrated that these instructors meet the basic requirements of (i) an ESOL instructor, including CELTRA, and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL experience, and/or (ii) an ASL instructor (Provisional or Qualified and Professional certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source.). This was submitted with the application as **Attachment 7: ONA ESOL Instructor Qualifications.**

or

Applicant proposed repurposing an ONA ESOL instructor and/or and ASL instructor already employed at the organization and fully demonstrated that this instructor meets the basic requirements of (i) an ESOL instructor, including CELTRA, and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL experience, and/or (ii) an ASL instructor (Provisional or Qualified and Professional certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source.). This was submitted with the application as **Attachment 7: ONA ESOL Instructor Qualifications.**

Section IX EVALUATION SECTION c. is hereby amended to read:

i. ESOL

- c) The applicant fully demonstrated that beginning, intermediate, ~~and~~-advanced, and any ASL classes will be offered. The applicant demonstrated that the proposed schedule of classes each quarter, including times held, will meet the needs of the new Americans in the region proposed.

Questions and Answers

Q1: For agencies that already host an ONA Opportunity Center, does the ONA Opportunity Center-ESOL have to be in a separate space from the other Opportunity Center, or can they share a space and post appropriate signage?

A1: Space may be shared provided all space costs charged to the grant are appropriately allocated.

Q2: Page 1, Section I: Does ONA have specific requirements or guidance for which “in-class technology” should be used?

A2: No specific technology is required. To meet the requirements of this grant, grantees should ensure that technology is incorporated into in-class instruction to supplement instruction in a way that best meets the needs of the communities being served.

Q3:

- **Page 2, Section IV: “This RFA seeks approximately 21 not-for-profit organizations capable of hosting an ONA Opportunity Center – ESOL on their premises.” Is it allowable to propose offering one or more of the courses on the premises of another organization? Especially if it helps meet the requirement to provide classes during the “day, night and weekend” and makes services available to more clients?**
- **Please confirm Overview #1-“organizations capable of hosting an ONA Opportunity Center-ESOL on their premises”. Does that mean that the host organization cannot partner with an existing ESOL provider to use their space, without reimbursement, while using its own host organization staff member? Do all services need to be rendered at the host organization?**

A3: Classes may be held at any location within the awarded service region that is most convenient to clients and/or online. Grantees may partner with organizations, however grantees cannot subcontract for these services.

Q4: Page 6, Section V: Though funds may not be used to supplant other grant awards, may they support other grant awards for ESOL classes that are currently underfunded? For example, if we propose to offer a course that provides 150 hours of class per quarter may it be funded 50% (75 hours) by ONA and 50% (75 hours) by other funding?

A4: Yes, providing all the deliverables outlined in this RFA are met as per ONA requirements.

Q5: Page 5, Section IV, 3: Regarding the ‘individual guidance’ clients must receive on resume building, interview techniques and employment opportunities, must those services be provided by staff funded under this grant?

A5: No.

Q6: If an organization receives other funding to provide those workforce services, may the clients be served under that funding instead?

A6: Yes, providing all the deliverables outlined in this RFA are met as per ONA requirements.

Q7: Page 10, Section VII, 5: Would ONA look unfavorably on a proposed budget that includes only salary costs if the applicant can demonstrate other necessary program costs could be covered by other funding sources?

A7: No, however applicants should indicate in the budget template narrative how each of the necessary program costs will be covered, even if it is through other funding sources.

Q8: Page 3, Section IV, 2: How does ONA define beginner, intermediate and advanced, or is that distinction up to the applicant?

A8: That distinction is up to the applicant based on the needs of their community however the organization should develop a written process by which to assign students to class levels based on their score on the assessment tool used. Applicants must determine levels based on student assessments at the beginning of each quarter using standard assessment instruments approved by ONA. Some instruments may include but are not limited to the Test of Adult Basic Education (“TABE”); the BEST Plus (computer or print-based); and/or the BEST Literacy

Q9: Page 5, Section IV, 3: Can the ESOL Opportunity Center work with the area’s ONA Immigrant Community Navigator to provide the ten workshop development seminars, provided they aren’t double counted?

A9: Yes, the ONA Immigrant Community Navigator may assist with the planning and outreach of the workforce development seminars. ONA Immigrant Community Navigators cannot host workshops under this grant.

Q10: Page 5, Section IV, 3: Can the 10 workforce workshops be held during class time?

A10: No, workforce workshops must be separate and held outside of ESOL class time.

Q11: Page 5, Section IV, 4: Will ONA provide materials to distribute to students regarding the ONA Hotline?

A11: ONA will provide flyers and other materials to promote the Hotline, however any grantee promotional materials developed for this program will be required to include the ONA Hotline.

Q12: Page 5, Section IV, 3: Is use of Cell-Ed required?

A12: No, Cell-Ed may be incorporated as part of programming but is not required.

Q13:

- **Does ONA have an expected contract start date?**
- **When is this grant expected to begin? In other words, what is the anticipated grant period?**

A13: Anticipated contract start date is Fall 2021.

Q14: To better assess the administrative / reporting burden, can ONA clarify the frequency and scope of programmatic reporting (attendance, testing, workshops, volunteer hours, etc.)?

A14: Grantees will be required to submit quarterly reports summarizing performance. Grantees will also be expected to share with ONA the list of registered students no later than the end of the second week of each quarter. All documentation must be available for review at any time during the grant period upon request.

Q15:

- **We have a strong local presence, yet are part of a national organization with a national Board of Directors, and therefore do not meet the requirement for more than half the members residing in our community. We have a local Advisory Committee composed of local business and community leaders, which in some ways functions like a Board, and chair a bimonthly roundtable representing local stakeholders serving refugees and immigrants. It would seem the reasons for requiring local board leadership would also be met through these ongoing practices. Would it be possible to adapt this Board requirement to include organizations with these types of local presence to apply?**
- **Applicant eligibility requires a community-based organization to have a board of directors of which more than half of the members reside in [the] designated community. How will “community” be defined? By zip code? By county? By census tracts?**

A15: In accordance with Section III of the RFA, applicants must have a board of directors of which more than half of the members reside in its designated community. The designated community means the area in which the

organization may provide services or other assistance as set forth in its articles of incorporation. The designated community must include the area in which the applicant proposes to provide services through the RFA but does not have to be restricted to New York State.

Q16: What if a proposed Center will operate in a location different from the location of the applicant's headquarters? For example, the applicant's official headquarters may be located in a neighboring, but different municipality with a different zip code from the proposed Center. Does the applicant Board need to include representations from members of the community in which the proposed Center is located?

A16 The Center may operate in a location different from the location of the applicant's headquarters, as long as the location is within the service region awarded. In accordance with Section III of the RFA, applicants must have a board of directors of which more than half of the members reside in its designated community. The designated community means the area in which the organization may provide services or other assistance as set forth in its articles of incorporation. The designated community must include the area in which the applicant proposes to provide services through the RFA but does not have to be restricted to New York State.

Q17: Is there a minimum class size?

A17: There is no minimum class size for individual classes. As stated in RFA Section IV. 2. *Registration*, ONA Opportunity Centers - ESOL classes are expected to run on a quarterly basis, enrolling a minimum of 40-60 clients across the different classes. Opportunity Centers - ESOL will be required to register a minimum of 60 clients in three out of four quarters each year. In the other quarter, the registration requirement will be a minimum of 40 registered clients across the different classes, for a total of 220 students per year

Q18: Could a program be designed to address individualized learning needs in the case of students with disabilities who may not be able to participate fully in a typical ESOL class??

A18: Applicants are encouraged to develop programming to meet the needs of all new Americans in their communities, however, all programming must adhere to the requirements as outlined in Section IV of the RFA.

Q19: A contingent of refugees is deaf or hard-of-hearing. Teaching them American Sign Language first would help them access and learn English. Could ASL instruction be considered part of the beginning process of learning English?

A19: Yes, however the applicant must demonstrate how they will meet all of the requirements as outlined in Section IV of the RFA.

Q20: If yes, does NYS DOS have any certification requirements for ASL instruction and instructors?

A20: The minimum qualifications for both paid and volunteer ESOL instructors under this grant are a certificate in teaching ESOL, such as CELTA, and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL teaching experience. In addition, for ASL instructors teaching both ESOL and ASL students, the instructor must have either Provisional, or Qualified and Professional certifications from the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) or equivalent certification from an accredited source. If a supplemental instructor is only teaching an ASL class, that individual does not need the CELTA and/or two years of demonstrated ESOL teaching experience.

Q21: Would American Sign Language (ASL) instruction require a pre-approved assessment like ESOL?

A21: Yes, all students under this grant must be assessed using a pre-approved assessment tool.

Q22: Is the Hotline accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals?

A22: The Hotline currently does not have TDD/TDY capability; however, ONA is looking to add this in the near future.

Q23: Can staff at a proposed Center facilitate engagement with the Hot Line and help the caller understand and interact with the Hot Line?

A23: Yes

Q24: Could these funds be used to propose a technical support to all ONA grantees in order to make all of the centers more accessible to New Americans with disabilities, and/or for a statewide individualized education program to support those who cannot attend due to disabilities?

A24: No, the funds for this RFA are to run programming as outlined in the RFA.

Q25:

- **Can classes be offered remotely during the entire contract period?**
- **On page 3 in the section on Instruction and Programming, the RFA states that instruction may be delivered online. Can all 75 hours of ESOL training to each client per quarter be provided online?**
- **For clarification, is it an option to conduct this entire program in an online format? If so, the RFA states “If instruction is done via an online platform, classes must be synchronous, with opportunities for students to communicate face to face with the instructor in real time.” Can communicating “face to face in real time” be accomplished using facetime, zoom or other live, video conferencing software/apps?**

A25: Yes, provided classes are synchronous, with opportunities for students to communicate face to face with the instructor in real time all 75 hours of ESOL training can be provided online/remotely for the entire contract period. Facetime, Zoom or other live, video conferencing software or apps are acceptable.

Q26: Can students who live outside the county (in which the Opportunity Center is located) be enrolled?

A26: Yes, provided they live in New York and meet the income eligibility requirements. Grantees are not permitted to do outreach for clients outside of their awarded service area.

Q27: Can the mandated three levels of ESOL programming be adapted to fit the population of students? (For example, if there are few students at the advanced level, could we offer beginner, intermediate, and high intermediate as the three levels, based on student test scores?)

A27: Each quarter, the grantee must be prepared to offer beginning, intermediate, and advanced courses. However, based on student testing, the grantee can apply for a waiver from ONA to readjust classes offered.

Q28: As noted on page 2 of the RFA #20-ONA-26, an organization is not precluded from applying unless it has an *ONA Opportunity Center - ESOL* currently in that zip code. We would like to confirm that if an organization has an existing ONA Opportunity Center contract that is not ESOL, it is eligible to apply in any and each of the available areas/counties/zip codes?

A28: There are no ONA Opportunity Center – ESOL currently. Current Opportunity Center grants are not considered ONA Opportunity Center –ESOL grants and current ONA grantees may apply in any and each of the available areas/counties/zip codes provided they meet the qualifications as outlined in Section III of this RFA.

Q29: If an organization is currently a grantee of ONA in another capacity (such as an existing Community Navigator, ONA opportunity center or ONA Liberty Defense Project), is that organization eligible to apply for this funding?

A29: Yes.

Q30: The RFA states “Each ONA Opportunity Center – ESOL will have a unique space within the host organization, which will be designated by branded signage.” If we are planning to offer the ONA Opportunity Center – ESOL course in a completely online format, a physical space with printed signage won’t be utilized. Can we instead differentiate the program in other ways, for instance, by using a branded logo on all Opportunity Center – ESOL outreach and materials?

Q30: If classes are offered online, the grantee does not need a physical space. All online programming must be promoted using the ONA logo.

Q31: The RFA states “clients who receive the 75 hours of ESOL training may be counted anew for the following quarter if they want to continue ESOL studies” – Can you confirm that this means that the 220 total students per year do not need to be unique?

A31: Yes. If a student enrolls in a subsequent quarter they will be counted as a new enrollee and each quarter of attendance will be included within the 220 total.

Q32: In an effort to encourage consistent participation in a class and therefore support a high retention rate, we often look to offer a small incentive to help students feel motivated to continue coming to class and improving skills – those who attend all classes would be eligible to win such a “prize”. These could include a \$10 gift card to a local store, etc. Would the costs of such incentives be allowable in the budget for this grant?

A32: No, incentives to clients are not eligible expenses under this grant.

Q33: The RFA states “Registration of clients will be required to have been accomplished by the second week of the quarter” at that time, will ONA require a full list of students registered in the program?

A33: Yes, ONA will require the list of students registered in the program by the end of the second week of each quarter.

Q34: Are there constraints on how much funding we can apply for our ESOL classes?

A34: Funds for each award in the initial year is anticipated to be approximately \$80,800 per contract. Proposed budgets should not exceed this amount.