

CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAL SERVICES

Moderator: Ray Thorn
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15:00 pm ET

Operator: Good afternoon, my name is (Beth), and I will be your conference operator today. At this time I would like to welcome everyone to our conference call today. Strong start, all lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise.

After the speaker's remarks, there will be a question and answer session. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star one on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, press the pound key, thank you. Ray Thorn, you may begin your conference.

Ray Thorn: Great, thank you (Beth), and thank you. Good afternoon everyone and thank you all for joining. Sorry for the momentarily delay at the beginning here, but my name is Ray Thorn and I'm with the (state corner engagement group in the CMS innovation center).

We're really pleased how you have joined us today on this conference call to discuss the Strong Start in this--to improve the care and health of mothers and newborns. So, thank you again for joining us today.

Just a few housekeeping items up just at the front, this call is being recorded and the audio and the slides--we do have slides today, which I will get to momentarily--the audio and slides of today's call will also be posted on the innovation center Web-site within a week. Actually, the slides are already posted, the audio and the transcript will be posted within the week.

If you are a member of the press, this call is off the record and if you have a question please contact the CMS press shop. Since the announcement of the

Strong Start initiative, we have received lots of questions, suggestions, and issues on the Strong Start funding opportunity.

The purpose of today's call is to give you all an update on where we are with the Strong Start funding opportunity and to listen to any concerns, comments, and feedback you may have. We really thank you for your patience as we continue to address the issues that you all continue to bring to our attention and raise with us.

Before we get into the presentation, as we mentioned we have—as I previously mentioned, we have posted some slides on the innovation center Web-site that the Strong Start program team will be presenting from. To locate the slides—and if you have Internet access right now, please go on-line to the innovation center Web-site at innovations.cms.gov.

On the homepage there is a link on today's Strong Start conference call under the What's New column on the left side of the Web-page. Click on that link and that will take you to the Web-page, to the conference call Web-page where the slides are posted. Again, that innovations.cms.gov and click on the Strong Start conference call link on the left side under the What's New column to access the slides.

If, for some reason, you are unable to access the slides, not to worry, the Strong Start team will present in a manner that do not require you to view the slides. So, I'm going to get into the speakers for today's conference and they are first speaking are—first will be Valinda Rutledge, who is the director of the innovation center patient care models group and oversees the Strong Start program.

She will not be speaking from slides, but the next two presenters Seth Edlavitch and Susan Jackson will be presenting from—will be speaking from the slides and they are both on the Strong Start program team. After the presentation there will be an opportunity for questions and answers.

In addition to questions, we also want to hear your feedback and comments about the Strong Start funding opportunity, particularly any feedback or comments that you might have on preparing the application for submission.

We also have in the room today, Erin Smith, who is also a member of the Strong Start program team. She will be also available for the questions and answers portion of the call.

If you do have a question or comment that we are not able to get to today, you can always e-mail us. Our e-mail address is strongstart@cms.hhs.gov again that is strongstart@cms.hhs.gov if we are unable to get to your questions or comments today during this call. And with that, I will turn it over to Valinda Rutledge.

Valinda Rutledge: Great, thank you Ray. Well, thanks all of you for joining us for today's call. We are very pleased about the high level interest many of you have showed in the Strong Start for mother and newborn initiative.

We felt that it was important for us to communicate some information with you, since it's been a while since we've had any verbal communication. Certainly all of you are always so free to send questions to the inbox, which we always appreciate.

But, it's been a while since we've had a webinar and had an opportunity for you to just ask us questions, so, we wanted to take this opportunity. First of all, we want to make sure that you know as much as possible where things currently stand with Strong Start funding opportunity, and when you can expect more information.

Since the launch of the Strong Start initiative, CMS has received numerous questions and suggestions from many of you are interested in participating with us in testing new models of perinatal care that is a potential to improve maternity and child health while reducing cost.

And we're very pleased with the amount of interest that all of you have showed in that partnership, because as we all know, this is a very, very important initiative.

As you know the applications were due on June the 13th, but just before that we had received many important questions and issues from many of you

regarding some of the questions that you had about the application, many aspects of the application.

And in order to be good partners, and to address these issues we took many of your suggestions, your concerns and we actually went ahead and revised the FOA, which is the funding opportunity announcement, and that is the one in which you read that you put your application in.

So right now we're in the process of going through clearance and what clearance is, is (its approval) process that we use in the federal government for approval of any of our documents before they're released.

Right now, the new FOA, the funding opportunity announcement, is in the midst of that clearance. So until we get through clearance and until we post it on our Web-site, we cannot discuss the specifics of the FOA, the changes in the FOA.

However, we are going to extend the application deadline to allow potential applicants the time to develop their models based upon some of these revisions in the FOA. On this call we will be unable to give you the specifics of the changes in the FOA, we would love to be able to do that on this call, but we simply cannot do that.

We have to wait until the document goes through clearance, everybody approves it from an internal point of view, and then we will actually post it on our Web-site and all of you will get an e-mail telling you that it is posted. But, we have a few things that we are able to share with you right now.

Number one is we will extend the application deadline. There will be a new application deadline. Number two, the letters of intent will not be required to submit a Strong Start application, so those of you that did not submit a letter of intent by May 11th can actually still submit an application when the new FOA is released and you see the deadline, the new deadline for the application.

So, again, let me reinforce a couple things. Number one is the FOA is in internal review at CMS. Once it gets done, we will post it. You will be able

to see the revised FOA, we will send out an e-mail so everyone knows that it has been posted. We will also at that point have a webinar in which we will go step-by-step through the changes in that new FOA.

Second, letters of intent will not be required. So, if you didn't put your letters of intent in by May 11th, but you still want to apply, you're going to be able to do that when the new FOA comes through.

Finally, I'm going to turn it over to Seth and Susan to discuss some additional updates on Strong Start, but I do want to reinforce to you, we may be limited with some of your questions. Certainly feel free to ask them, we may have to say I'm sorry we cannot answer your question at this point, that's too specific of a question, it will be answered when the FOA is posted.

So, if you would appreciate the discretion we have to stay within the government rules and regulations in terms of announcement. Again, once the revised FOA is posted, we will send an e-mail out so everyone is aware of it and we will give everyone plenty of time for them to ask us any questions that they have.

We want to again reinforce to all of you how committed we are to this program. Because of this deadline being changed, and because of us revising the FOA, it does not at all indicate at all that we are not going forward with this program, we are. We continue to be committed to this program. We have hundreds of you on this call, so I think it indicates the degree of interest around the country.

What it does represent is we listen to what you said when you shared with us some of the difficulties that you were having, you wanted more time, you felt that there needed to be more clarification.

We listened to you - we want to make sure that we have a program that is really a positive experience for all of you as you are partnering with us to improve (first) outcomes throughout this country and impacting millions of births in this country.

So, with that, I will turn it over to Seth and Susan that will provide additional information on it based upon what we can say at this point.

Seth Edlavitch: Thank you very much, Valinda. Hi, I'm Seth Edlavitch, I'm very happy to be speaking to you today. I'm going to start off by speaking on slide one, the first couple of slides. Just to remind everybody what the Strong Start for mothers and newborn initiative is all about.

For some of you, you've heard this before and for others, this is new information. As you all may know, the Strong Start initiative has two different, but related strategies. There's one strategy reducing early elective deliveries and the strategy which we're talking about today, which is delivering enhanced prenatal care.

Strategy two, as we referred to it, is a funding opportunity that tests the effectiveness of specific enhanced prenatal care approaches to reduce pre-term births in women covered by Medicaid and or CHIP. If you turn to slide two, if you have that in front of you, we have a cooperative agreement funding opportunity.

The folks who are eligible to apply for that are providers, state managed care organizations, and conveners. And the goal is to test evidence based approaches to delivering enhanced prenatal care that improves health outcomes for mothers and infants in Medicaid.

And, of course, we're specifically interested in reducing pre-term births. There are three models on page three of the presentation that we focus on in FOA and all of the approaches will share common elements, which include case management, counseling, psychosocial support, and they will be delivered in addition to the standard prenatal care.

I'll briefly describe the three approaches, or models. There's (centering) care groups, and that's group prenatal care that incorporates peer support and facilitated setting for three components.

Health assessment education and support, there are birth centers, which provides comprehensive prenatal care facilitated by midwives and teams of

health professionals, including peer counselors and doulas, and the focus includes building relationships with patients.

And then there are maternity care homes which provides enhanced prenatal care at traditional prenatal sites expanding access and continuity care coordination and content. I'm going to now turn the presentation over to Susan to talk about update.

Susan Jackson: Good afternoon everyone, my name's Susan Jackson, and hopefully I'll be able to provide some updates. I think much of this is going to be reiterating some of the messages you've already heard, but I want continue to express our commitment to this program.

The Strong Start initiative continues to focus on improving health and reducing cost by improving outcome for high-risk pregnant Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries. We are revising the funding opportunity announcement. This revision will allow us to address important stake holder issues, applicant questions, and provide additional clarification.

These revisions will affect the application requirement. Although I cannot comment on the specific content of these revisions, the revised funding opportunity announcement will be released within the next few weeks. We will hold another stake holder call to address the new contents of the revised FOA, and we hope that you'll join us again to hear about those.

Some of you may have received an automated message from grants.gov, stating that the grant opportunity had been deleted. The Strong Start funding opportunity is not deleted. We are still committed to the success of the Strong Start initiative, however, we do not want applications submitted until the official amended funding opportunity is released.

The application package for Strong Start, which is traditionally posted on grants.gov, will re-open once the funding opportunity announcement is released. Letters of intent are now optional and may be submitted on the Strong Start Web-page found at www.innovations.gov.

We continue to support applicants to be part of the Strong Start platform. This platform allows LOI submitters to access main location contact information and enhanced prenatal care approaches of others consenting LOI submitters. So, if you haven't submitted an LOI, we still want you to submit it, and join the platform so that you can find other applicants in your area.

To do this, if you've submitted a letter of intent, and would like to share your information, please have the point of contact listed on your LOI. Send an e-mail to Strong Start resource box stating yes, my organization consents to share information.

Again, the letter of intent can be found on the innovations center Web-site at innovation.cms.gov. We are committed to a diverse and competitive applicant pool representing providers, managed care organizations, states and conveners.

We will be extending the deadline to apply for the Strong Start funding opportunity announcement. By extending this deadline, we will—it will help us reach our evaluation targets of 30,000 women in each of the three enhanced prenatal care approaches. And, we will have a definite, final deadline, which will be included in the revised funding opportunity announcement.

Once the FOA's released, potential applicants may register. Applicants registered on grants.gov, registered on the innovations center listserv or who have submitted an LOI will receive an e-mail update. Upon release, the revised FOA will be available on grants.gov and on the Strong Start Web-page.

Applicants will be given an appropriate amount of time following the release of the revised funding opportunity announcement to respond to these revisions. We encourage applicants to continue to submit questions and concerns to the Strong Start resource box, which is StrongStart@cms.hhs.gov.

We would especially like to hear about concerns concerning the timeline and time necessary to review and respond to the revised FOA, as well as any difficulties completing your application for submission. We hear all of your concerns and we're definitely trying to address them through clarifications and frequently asked questions.

There are people that are reading the inbox, but I know it's frustrating because some times it takes us a while, but people are listening. And we really appreciate everyone's patience and continued support of the Strong Start for mothers and newborns program.

Please continue to stay tuned and right now we're going to open this back up for some questions. I'm going to turn this over to Ray for questions and comments and we want to encourage you to submit questions also on-line at our--to the Strong Start inbox.

Ray Thorn: Thank you Susan, and just before we open the lines up for questions and comments, I do want to reiterate that we are interested in soliciting comments and feedback as Susan just mentioned, on the application timeline and any potential difficulties in submitting applications in addition to whatever questions you might have.

Again, if we aren't able to get to your question or comment today, please feel free to e-mail us at StrongStart@cms.hhs.gov. And when the revised FOA is released, all the information on the Strong Start program will be posted on the innovation center Web-site at www.innovation.cms.gov. So, with that operator, we are ready for questions.

Operator: At this time, I would like to remind everyone in order to ask a question, star one on your telephone keypad. We'll pause for just a moment to compile the Q&A roster. Your first question comes from the line of (Carrell Petrick) Harris County Hospital, your line is open.

(Carrell Petrick): Good afternoon. You stated that--in fact, the key issues raised by the stake holders that made you postpone, in fact, the deadline. Could you please list the most important key issues that led you to make the decision?

Susan Jackson: Unfortunately, we cannot comment on the content of the revised FOA, and this also means that we cannot provide specifics of the comments and concerns that we are addressing.

(Carrell Petrick): Well, in fact, that's not my question. I wasn't asking about the amended announcement. My question was what were the issues?

Susan Jackson: Right, and unfortunately we cannot comment on those issues.

(Carrell Petrick): OK, well (inaudible) I can tell you, you haven't said anything new in today's announcement for half and hour.

Ray Thorn: Thank you very much for the comment.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of Jerry Reeves Health Insight, your line is open.

Jerry Reeves: Thank you. What are the unmet needs that are met with the new revised funding announcement?

Erin Smith: So, it sounds like this question is very similar to the one we heard before and as Valinda mentioned in her opening remarks, we aren't able to speak to the revisions that--and the comments and concerns that we're responding to in the FOA.

We will be posting the FOA as soon as we can, but because it hasn't been cleared through multiple levels of--and different agencies in the government, we aren't able to speak to that yet because it's not an official document yet and it hasn't--it doesn't have an official decision made yet.

So, unfortunately, we do understand that there are a variety of concerns out there and we are actively looking to address them and we are also working individually with folks as they ask us questions by phone and e-mail. So, we aren't able to speak to the actual revisions of the FOA at this time.

Female: I'm also with Dr. Reeves and I have a follow-up question. In your--one of the e-mails that came out, it was indicated that some of the issues raised related to the provision of data and the ability to obtain the data, can we assume, then from that, that there will be a lot of clarification on the data requirements?

Erin Smith: So, unfortunately I'm not able to respond to both the concerns coming in and the revisions going out because those two issues are linked so closely together

and we don't want to mislead people into believing that there's some reading in between the lines or that we are trying to speak in code to you right now.

We really just can't speak to what the new revision--what the revisions are to the FOA and what the new requirements will be. We--I can tell you that we will be giving people time to respond to those revisions, so it isn't necessary that you guess at them at this point or try to infer from what we're saying because we really are actively trying to make sure that there is time to respond to any revisions in the FOA and any changes in the requirements on the application.

And I understand that there's concern from folks, but if your concern is that you won't have enough time to respond to those changes in the FOA, we would very much like to hear that so we can be responsive to that concern.

Female: How much time are planning to give up once the FOA is released?

Erin Smith: Again, I can't speak to that right now because decisions haven't been made yet because they are based on the timeline it takes to get the FOA released and cleared.

So unfortunately, we only have a tentative dates at this time and I don't want to say anything and mislead people into believing the amount of time they have. We would like to hear back from you all and you in particular, how much time folks think that they need in order to make adjustments.

Male: Why did you have this call today?

Erin Smith: We wanted to make sure that people understand that we're still committed to the funding opportunity and the goals of the program. We understand that there's been a lot of concerns out there and we've heard rumors and other assumptions coming back from stake holders and potential applicants.

We wanted to make sure that that information was not coming from us. We want to make sure that people understand that those assumptions are not necessarily true and the information coming from us is that we really cannot

speaking to those revisions and we want to make sure that people don't think that we have spoken about the content of the revised FOA.

So, at this time, we really need to make sure that people are working off of an official documents and that they are not working based on assumptions and hearsay from others out in the public.

Male: Thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you very much for the questions and the comments. Operator, we're ready for the next question.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of (Lisa LaLero) Network Health, your line is open. Your line is open. (Lisa LaLero)?

(Lisa LaLero): Hello?

Ray Thorn: Hi, you're on--your line is open (Lisa).

(Lisa LaLero): Thank you. Thank you for taking my call. We're an organization, we're MCO and we're interested in applying and had put in a letter of intent and decided that we had a lot on our plate, but I guess I'm looking for clarification on, if we are an MCO and we reach an agreement with providers to participate in the program.

Are there differences in applying as an MCO or as a convener in any material differences between applying as one as opposed to the other?

Erin Smith: Sorry, no there aren't any changes to that--there aren't any differences between being the different types of applicant that you are. The same requirements are applied to all applicants.

We are asking that folks who aren't providers partner with part providers, like you say you're doing and present us with letter of partnership from those providers because we know that entities such as (inaudible) and MCO's aren't necessarily providing the prenatal services themselves.

So we do need some showing that there are providers on the ground who will be providing those services that will be funded through the funding opportunity. But, as far as the application requirements and as far as the measurements and the way we'll be evaluating the application, everybody's going to be on the same playing field.

(Lisa LaLero): OK, thank you. And I just had one other quick question. The data that we'll be collecting, will that become proprietary of CMS?

Susan Jackson: Can you clarify your question by what you mean by proprietary?

(Lisa LaLero): Sure. I guess, will there be restrictions on how an applicant can use the data after applying, and hypothetically being accepted for the funding opportunity? Will there be restrictions set on the data to be used in other forms?

Susan Jackson: Yes, and that's why I wanted the clarification because there's two different ways we could go. But, yes, it will be proprietary. The terms and conditions of the funding opportunity announcement will kind of lay out what the data's allowed to be used for and who has ownership and what it would take to release that data. I don't know if that answers your question, but it'll be worked out during terms and conditions of the application process.

(Lisa LaLero): OK, great. That does answer it, thank you very much.

Ray Thorn: Thank you (Lisa) for your question. Operator, we're ready for the next question.

Operator: Your next question comes from Susan DeJoy Bay State Medical Center, your line is open.

Susan DeJoy: Hi, thank you for taking my question. This is again about the lead time from the release of the FOA (inaudible). Approximately the same lead time as from the initial release to the initial submission date of June 15th?

Erin Smith: So, the initial announcement you're speaking about in February?

Susan DeJoy: Yes.

Erin Smith: So, we aren't looking at that kind of time frame. I can't really speak to the exact lead time in between the release revised FOA and the application deadline. But, I wouldn't want you to assume that it's going to be that far in between the two.

Susan DeJoy: OK. And a follow-up question, I think from the original submission date of June 15th, the announcement was going to be made in September, can we assume that there'll be a--the same amount of time from the new submission date until announcement, about three months?

Erin Smith: So, I think the answer's pretty much the same for this one. I can't speak to the refined dates because they're all kind of built on each other, it really does depend on what comes out in the revised FOA. And all of those dates will be put out in the revised FOA, and we'll give an announcement on that at that time.

Susan DeJoy: Thank you.

Erin Smith: Thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you Susan. Operator.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of (Jose Cordero) University of Florida. Your line is open.

(Jose Cordero): Hi, thank you for taking my call. I have a question about the actual date. I assume that the date be on July 13th will be extended and that's part of what you mean?

Erin Smith: Sure, I can speak to that. The July 13th date we put out there on the grants.gov, and so for those of you who are on the grants.gov update, you probably received an e-mail saying that the date has been extended to July 13th.

We also put in some language saying that that date is temporary, so it's kind of a holding place for right now. We wanted to make sure that we kept all the information out on-line and made sure that we kept this funding opportunity

open, we're just merely revising it. So, it's the same opportunity on grants.gov, but we're extending the deadline.

So, that deadline of July 13th is tentative at this point and we will be giving a final deadline after we know when we can post the revised FOA.

(Jose Cordero): Great. I have a second, (inaudible) another question related to—in the process of developing this—our proposal, we learn of other people in the jurisdiction. (Same) jurisdiction that we're doing another proposal, is there a general recommendation of trying to work together within the same jurisdiction, or basically its applicant will be judged separately and have the equal opportunity of being selected?

Susan Jackson: Well, each application is judged on its own merit based on the criteria that's laid out in the funding opportunity announcement. We can't tell you who to partner with, it's completely up to you.

We established the LOI platform site to allow applicants to at least to know other applicants that are applying in their area, but we're not going to—we're not encouraging or discouraging partnership.

We just want those resources available to our applicants. But each application will be judged based on its own merit against the criteria laid out in the funding opportunity announcement. And the minimum requirement that each application must meet.

(Jose Cordero): Thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you (Jose). Operator.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of Richard Sass, Contact Wellness Foundation. Your line is (inaudible).

Richard Sass: Thank you. My question has to do with the capital that's been set aside, or is being considered to be set aside for the CMS innovation challenge grant with submittals. End of January, there was a \$1 billion set aside, if I understand, this FOA initially was only allocating \$42 million, am I misreading

something, or are we looking at something that is grossly undercapitalized here?

Susan Jackson: No, so you're absolutely correct. The Strong Start initiative is for \$43.2 million, up to \$43.2 million. The Health Care Innovation Award is a completely separate initiative also under the innovation center, and their budget and funds are separate from ours.

Richard Sass: Thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you, Richard. Operator.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of (Linda McCart), Wisconsin. Your line is open.

Ray Thorn: Hi, (Linda), your line is open.

Operator: We'll go on the next one.

Susan Jackson: OK.

Ray Thorn: OK.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of Kathleen Urbansky, your line is open. Please state the name of your organization.

Kathleen Urbansky: Hi, this (Kathy) Urbansky, thank you very much for taking my question. I'm with University Health System.

Ray Thorn: Hi, go ahead (Kathy).

Kathleen Urbansky: OK, my question is in the process of going through the FOA and also the application packet, we notice that there were errors and omissions and had submitted some questions regarding how to handle some of those omissions. Can we expect the new application package, specifically to have those corrections when it gets reposted?

Susan Jackson: (Kathy), I will have to go back to your questions in the inbox to look them up specifically, because I'm not sure which omissions you're talking about specifically, but we do try to have—there will be an updated application packet that is posted on grants.gov, so hopefully it will address the questions that you had in the inbox.

Kathleen Urbansky: OK, so for those of us who have gone through this process and completed that and were—is submitting, we will need to do the entire application package, correct?

Susan Jackson: Yes, that's correct.

Kathleen Urbansky: OK.

Erin Smith: We're asking everybody to resubmit an application, and I understand that that's more time and effort on your part and we do appreciate the fact that people are willing to do so in order to be a part of this program.

But, because the requirements are changing in the FOA, and that everybody will be measured against the revised FOA that will be posted soon, we wanted to make sure that everybody has an equal chance and that is measured on the same rules.

So, everybody will need to resubmit their application and they'll be using the new application packet that posted on grants.gov at that time.

Kathleen Urbansky: OK, thank you.

Ray Thorn: Great, thank you (Kathy). And also the revised FOA will be posted on the innovation center Web-site as well. Operator, we're ready for the next question.

Operator: Your next question comes from (Leslie Tursos) (inaudible). Your line is open.

(Leslie Tursos): Yes, good afternoon. I have two questions. The first one is, if we submitted an LOI and our budget was at certain amount, but once we we're actually going through the application and the budget, we were seeing that we wanted

to request more to fit what we want to do. Are we allowed to do that, or do we still have to stay with the (LOA) amount we had requested?

Susan Jackson: So, LOI's are absolutely non-binding. We use them for planning purposes, but if you submit a budget during your—for your LOI, your application budget can be different, you just need to provide the necessary justification for that.

(Leslie Tursos): Yes, correct.

Ray Thorn: (Leslie), we—I think we had an additional add-on to that—

Male: I just wanted to remind you, the LOI's are now not mandatory, so anyways, just to keep that in mind.

(Leslie Tursos): OK, great. Thank you. And the second question is, I'm in California, and we have been told by the state that there are some issues with the reporting that California can do, is that something that you will continue to work on with the state?

Erin Smith: Sorry, this is Erin speaking again. We are going to continue to work with states and we've—same as we've said before in the past, that we are definitely willing to partner with states and to work with them on any of the data requirements for the program and we are continuing to (feel) questions from potential applicants and we'd like to hear from potential applicants that may be having problems in the application process and what we can do to help facilitate. We understand that some of these data requirements are easy for some states or more difficult for other states and we're going to continue to work with states on this process.

(Leslie Tursos): OK, thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you, (Leslie). Operator.

Operator: Your next question comes from Kay Rousseau Ross, University of Florida. Your line is open.

Kay Roussos-Ross: Good afternoon. I had a couple questions. One of them, I believe, you're probably not going to be able to answer, but let me just pose it and you can say no if you need to.

So, I was interested in knowing if most of the concerns of having postponed this application was due to problems with states getting, for instance, like letters of support or was it with the grants.gov application itself where people couldn't fill out the application correctly?

Erin Smith: Sure, as I told one of the first callers, we don't want to speak too much on to what concerns we are responding to because it leaves folks to believe what the revisions are going to be.

Kay Roussos-Ross: OK.

Erin Smith: We're just cautious of misleading folks –

Kay Roussos-Ross: Sure.

Erin Smith: – because I don't want anybody to read into anything until the requirements are actually posted and everybody can actually know what they're working on.

We do plan to give you time to work through those revisions in order to have a fair chance to respond to those, because I know folks will have to have worked on their applications for now, several months, and so they will need to make some revisions, and we hope that they'll—that everybody will stay engaged in the process.

Kay Roussos-Ross: So, for instance, those of us that had everything completed that were happy with our application, that had everything in order, we should still expect that we're going to have to make changes?

Erin Smith: Right--

Kay Roussos-Ross: If we were happy with it and had everything we needed?

Erin Smith: – it's very tough to say what everybody's application will be like and speak in absolutes because we haven't reviewed any of the applications in detail. And, I, I mean, so you--

Kay Roussos-Ross: – well we, like I was--yes, I had submitted a question saying can I still send it in, and y'all said no, do not send in, so like, we never sent ours, but, we were about to send it.

Erin Smith: – right, that's the right approach. We asked everybody to hold off on submitting applications because you haven't seen any of the requirements, and the requirements are not yet final, and so we want everybody to be able to read the rules prior to submitting their application. Chances are likely, is very likely that you'll have to make at least some minor revisions to your application. Some folks will have minor revisions and some may have a little bit more substantial depending on the details that are in every application. So, it's really hard to speak in absolute.

Kay Roussos-Ross: OK.

Erin Smith: We do expect there to be changes in everybody's application, so we ask everybody to hold off on that.

Kay Roussos-Ross: Got you.

Erin Smith: Yes. And so folks who did already submit, we would ask that they review their application and review the FOA changes, and those changes in the FOA will be highlighted or bolded and underlined so you'll be able to see them very easily. And then respond to their application.

Kay Roussos-Ross: Got you. And then my final thing was, did I hear you correctly in saying it may take weeks for the new FOA to come out. Like plural, weeks.

Erin Smith: We honestly don't know how long it takes. We are very, very much trying to get this done very soon. It could be weeks, it could be days. So, I mean we really just don't know.

Kay Roussos-Ross: Sure.

Erin Smith: So I apologize for not having a better time frame for you.

Kay Roussos-Ross: That's OK, thank you for answering, I appreciate it.

Erin Smith: Sure.

Ray Thorn: Thank you (Kaye). Operator, we're ready for the next question.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of (Jennifer Fisco) (inaudible), Lincoln Hospital. Your line is open.

(Jennifer Fisco): Hi, good afternoon. I was calling just because I was wondering if you were aware of the problem with the budget form, the object class category. I was not able to populate it the way that you had put into the FOA, where year one, year two, year three, year four. I was just wondering if you were aware of that.

Susan Jackson: And that is a concern that we have heard from others.

(Jennifer Fisco): OK.

Ray Thorn: So, we're working, we're aware of it.

(Jennifer Fisco): OK, good, I just wanted to make sure.

Susan Jackson: We are working on it.

(Jennifer Fisco): OK, sounds good, thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you (Jennifer).

(Jennifer Fisco): Bye, bye.

Ray Thorn: Operator, next question.

Operator: Next, we have (Beverly Crisp), Cherokee Health System. Your line is open.

(Beverly Crisp): Yes, you may not be able to answer this, but is the requirement for 500, at least 500 patients per year, is that still going to remain the same?

Susan Jackson: We cannot comment on the specific content of changes. We have said in previous FOA's that the minimum is 500 Medicaid beneficiaries per year, 1500 over the course of three years. That's what's in the previous FOA.

Ray Thorn: And unfortunately we can't comment on what—if that requirement will change or not.

Susan Jackson: Exactly, sorry.

(Beverly Crisp): OK, well thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you (Beverly). Operator, next question.

Operator: Next we have from the line of (Rachel Eudowe), (Immigrant Self Promotion). Your line is open.

(Rachel Eudowe): Hi, thanks for taking my call. Some really valid concerns have been expressed during the course of this call, but I also think that I speak for many of us in saying thank you to CMS for taking the time to look at this opportunity again, work with stake holders who may be concerned that the ultimate outcome of this program is something that can have the maximum benefits to the communities that we serve, so I really appreciate that, thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you.

Susan Jackson: We appreciate that comment.

Ray Thorn: Thank you (Rachel), and that's what this is all about. We want to work in partnership with you and others and ensuring that this program is going to be successful, so thank you again for that comment, we really appreciate that. Operator, next question or comment.

Operator: Next, we have from the line of Elizabeth Chan, Sharp Health Care. Your line is open.

Elizabeth Chan: You may not be able to answer my question, but in the previous FOA, you provided a budget narrative sample and the budget narrative, as it was before, was supposed to be included in the 40 page narrative section, which had to be double-spaced, but the sample was not double-spaced, so if you can, does the budget narrative have to be double-spaced?

Susan Jackson: That is a very specific question, unfortunately, we cannot comment on the specific content changes to the FOA. Stay tuned, but I did want to because this is relatively related to application submissions. I did want to say that if people are submitting applications to grants.gov and have issues with the actual submission process, you guys will need to send your complaints directly to grants.gov and get a confirmation number that you had an issue submitting your application for technical problem.

Elizabeth Chan: Thank you.

Ray Thorn: Thank you Elizabeth. Operator, next question.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of Jill Alliman. Please state the name of your organization or business. Your line is open.

Jill Alliman: Hi, this is Jill Alliman with the American Association of Birth Centers. My question is, I think many of us on this call today did have complete applications ready to submit at the time that the deadline was changed and so on.

As a convener of a multi state application, I would just—I guess it's more of a comment than a question, but I would just ask that one of the hardest requirements for putting the application together was, for us, was getting the letters of support for a multi state proposal, and I would just ask that with the changes that the requirements that are contained in those letters of support not be changed because it took several months to get letters from some of the states.

So, I think that could really delay the process if the letters of support requirement or the contents of the letters is changed in any way, and I know you can't say whether it is, but that is a concern.

Erin Smith: Thank you for that comment. I want to let other folks know that we have heard that comment as well from other people, and we do appreciate hearing from everybody because it is helpful from our end to make sure we understand what's happening with applicants and with the requirements that we sent out.

I want to reassure everybody that I know that many of you put many months worth of work into your applications and we don't think that that work has been—that that work was done in vain.

So, the core program does remain the same and we are going to continue to fund enhanced prenatal care and so we really hope that people do stay engaged in the process and aren't discouraged by the fact that we are making revisions at this point.

We really are making revisions in order to make the program more successful and not—the intent is not just to create burdens for anybody, so I hope that you all understand that the work you put in is still very useful for the program and for your applications.

Jill Alliman: Thank you very much, and I do appreciate the work that you're putting in to clarify and I do just hope you'll take into consideration some of the affects certain changes might have on (inaudible). Thank you very—

Erin Smith: Thank you for raising that, that's very important information.

Ray Thorn: Thank you Jill. Operator, our next question.

Operator: Your next question is from a line, I'm sorry, we do not have the name. Your line is open, please state your name and name of organization. Your line is now open.

Female: Hello.

Ray Thorn: Hi, your line is open. Operator, I guess we can go to the next question.

Operator: Again, from a participant who's name has not been received. Please state your name and your name of your organization. Your line is open.

Female: Hello?

Female: Hello?

Ivy McLaurin: Is that me?

Erin Smith: We can hear you.

Ivy McLaurin: OK. My name is Ivy McLaurin, I'm sorry my name wasn't registered, I got cut off and had to log back in. I am with the Scotland Memorial Foundation of Scotland Healthcare Systems. My question is about the LOI is not required, but it will be required if we wish to share our info with other organizations. Is this in a search for partners?

Susan Jackson: Sorry, if you would like to use a platform in order to find partners or to convene with others, then you'll have to submit an LOI and then you'll check the box that says you'd like to share your information and then you can get access to that platform. But that is really to be used for partnering and for (inaudible).

Ivy McLaurin: So, when you say share information that would be contact information and not other information?

Susan Jackson: It's your name your location contact information phone and then whatever model you're doing.

Ivy McLaurin: Is it required that we partner with our state government in this? Like HHS.

Erin Smith: Are you talking about for the LOI submission for the partnering?

Ivy McLaurin: I'm talking about for the project.

Erin Smith: So, for the partnering with the LOI platform, that's for folks including partner--provider and provider partnerships or providers who want to partner for anybody else. So that partnership is open for any type of partner. I'm

using the word partner an awful lot, so for any type of partnership, whether that be amongst MCO's and others or with states.

So that platform is really for any type of partnership.

Ivy McLaurin: OK. This is the first time I've done anything of this magnitude, so if I had any further questions, would I address them to StrongStart@cms.hhs.gov? Or someone to whom I should—I'm sorry.

Erin Smith: The voices that you're hearing on the phone today are those folks who will answer that (inaudible) inbox. So, you're directing (them at up) any time you e-mail the inbox.

Ivy McLaurin: Great, thank you very much. I appreciate your patience and thank you for your help.

Ray Thorn: Thank you and thank you for your patience as well. Operator, we are going to take one more question and then we'll wrap things up.

Operator: Your next question, again from a line we did not get the name. Please state your name and name of your organization or business. Your line is open.
Your line is open.

Ray Thorn: We can go to the next person in the queue, operator.

Operator: Again, from a participant, your line is open. Please state the name of your organization.

Ray Thorn: Hi, your line is open.

Hindy Langer: Hello?

Ray Thorn: Hi, this is—your line is open. If you could please state your name and organization, that'll be great.

Hindy Langer: Hindy Langer.

Erin Smith: Sorry?

Ray Thorn: Sorry?

Hindy Langer: Hi, is this me? Am I--

Ray Thorn: Yes, it is.

Hindy Langer: OK, fine, I'm sorry. It's Hindy Langer, it's Lakewood Resource and Referral Center. So, I have two comments. One was and you asked for feedback about how long we think it'll--how long we think (inaudible) need to get it out.

I think that considering the different letter of support that may need to be revised and everything, I'm speaking for myself, but it's fair to say that people will need at least three to four weeks to put it together.

Just to re-get any information, so that's one piece. The other question that I had was that, the slides (inaudible) deadline (inaudible) our evaluation (inaudible).

Ray Thorn: I'm sorry Hindy, you're breaking up there.

Hindy Langer: OK. In the slides, it says that extending the deadline will help us reach our evaluation needs of 90,000 women under the care of the three enhanced prenatal care models. And my question was, whether we can intuit from that that perhaps you don't have enough in one of the three models or in all the three models to look at.

Erin Smith: First off, we really do appreciate the feedback on the time frame that you would need to revise your application. That's excellent information for us. So, we honestly didn't receive applications in yet, so we wouldn't know what that world is, for instance.

We do want to make sure we are giving out fair information to everybody and that we are clear enough. We heard comments from the public that--and from potential applicants--that we weren't clear enough on some of our requirements and that perhaps we were confusing people.

And so that led us to think that we wanted to make sure that we gave more clarity and more clarifications as well as revising the FOA and then giving

time to folks to respond to those clarifications. So that way we can make sure we had really strong application pool, an application pool in order to get those 90,000 women that are getting the enhanced prenatal care services.

That 90,000 is the minimum we think we need to do a very strong evaluation of this program.

Hindy Langer: OK, I got it. Thank you very much.

Ray Thorn: And we're going to take this opportunity to really thank everyone for joining today's call. We know—we appreciate your comments and questions, and also your patience.

The information that we are collecting from you all is going to be very helpful as we continue to move toward the revised opportunity, funding opportunity announcement through the, through our process here at CMS and then also within the federal government.

But, we want to again, reassure you that CMS is still committed to the Strong Start initiative and to the goal of reducing early—to the goal of reducing pre-term births, and also early elective deliveries. So, if you have any questions or comments that we were unable to get to today, please, please e-mail the Strong Start e-mail box at StrongStart@c at, excuse me, StrongStart@—

Susan Jackson: – cms--

Ray Thorn: – cms.hhs.gov, forgive me. So, StrongStart@cms.hhs.gov, so again, thank you all for joining us today and hope everyone has a great day.

Operator: This concludes today's conference call. You may now disconnect, thank you.

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