

# ACL Social Care Referrals Challenge Competition Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## Version 3 – November 2020

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This document will be updated with responses to additional questions ACL receives. Questions are divided into categories: General, Technical, Team Formation/Stakeholders, Phase 1, and Phase 2. This version of the FAQs includes questions from the July 28<sup>th</sup> and October 15<sup>th</sup> webinars. For more information, webinar recordings, and materials, please visit <https://acl.gov/socialcarereferrals>.

### General Questions

1. **Question:** What is a Challenge?

**Response:** A Challenge (also referred to as "Prize Challenge," "Competition," "Prize Competition," "Incentive Prize" or any combination thereof) allows the public to solve problems presented by federal agencies and receive awards for the best solutions.

2. **Question:** What are the total prize amounts?

**Response:** The total prize award available is \$500,000. The Challenge will occur in three competitive phases with cash prizes awarded in each phase, as described below.

Phase 1: Concept & Design Submission (July – December 2020)

- Form multi-stakeholder team, register and develop ideas and concept designs of the proposed solution that describe team member roles and include use cases and technical workflow diagrams
- Up to six prize winners at \$30,000 each

Phase 2: Proof of Concept & Demonstration (January – June 2021)

- Winners from Phase 1 will develop proofs of concept and convene in-person or virtually to demonstrate proposed solutions
- Up to three prize winners at \$60,000 each

Phase 3: Implementation & Testing (July – December 2021)

- Winners from Phase 2 will demonstrate real-world testing of the designed approach.
- One final prize winner at \$140,000 or more, depending on number of Phase 1 and Phase 2 award winners

3. **Question:** Who is eligible for the Social Care Referrals Challenge?

**Response:** Individuals or entities may participate as part of one or more teams in this Challenge. Team formation is strongly encouraged. Teams are not limited in the number of members. Each team must designate a captain who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident and is responsible for all Challenge correspondence. [Please review additional terms and conditions here.](#)

4. **Question:** Can individuals who are not U.S. Citizens, but have a company based in the U.S. participate?

**Response:** Yes, however the designated team captain must be a U.S. citizen. Please visit [challenge.gov](https://challenge.gov) for more information.

5. **Question:** How are the funds awarded?  
**Response:** The funds for this Challenge will be awarded after the judging period of each phase and is a direct payment to one individual (the designated lead or captain) on the team.
6. **Question:** Would an award go directly to the lead applicant, who would then decide how to share among team members/partners?  
**Response:** Yes, that is correct. The prize money will be awarded to one individual (the designated team lead/captain). It is up to the team members to decide how the award is shared.
7. **Question:** How soon after each phase is completed do you anticipate awarding and distributing funds?  
**Response:** We anticipate the judging and technical review process to take no more than one month. Therefore, we hope to announce and award funds within one month of the end of each phase.
8. **Question:** What is the prize money/funding intended to cover?  
**Response:** This is ultimately up to the team. Challenge competitions are unique in that there are no specific activities outlined—unlike a typical grant. It is up to the team lead and the team members to determine how to use prize money.
9. **Question:** How do I register for the Social Care Referrals Challenge? Is a Letter of Intent still required?  
**Response:** Registration and the Phase 1 online application can be found at <https://socialcare.innovationchallenge.com>. A Letter of Intent is no longer required.
10. **Question:** Where do I send questions about the Challenge?  
**Response:** Questions concerning this Challenge should be emailed to [SocialCareChallenge@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:SocialCareChallenge@acl.hhs.gov).

## Technical Questions

11. **Question:** Must the submission be the creation of a new platform or can it be enhancing or modernizing an existing online platform? Could an applicant/coalition that has a pilot underway still apply?  
**Response:** This Challenge promotes the enhancement of existing technology platforms or the creation of new. We recognize that there are many existing systems that are used by states, local CBOs, hospitals, etc. We encourage enhancements to systems or technology already developed, piloted, or in use.
12. **Question:** Is it possible that proposals can be successful and parsimonious or, in other words, can applicants focus on a specific piece of the puzzle and/or submit designs or processes and institutional arrangements rather than a “new technology” per se?  
**Response:** Challenge competitions are unique as we have the opportunity to encourage discussion and collaboration on these ideas. We are aware that the problem may not be addressed at one time or through one solution. As we progress through the Challenge, we aim to promote collaboration among participants by helping teams talk with each other and continue the conversation beyond the competition. For example, an existing solution built from an HIE or existing referral platform that then adopts the Gravity Project standards and perhaps part of the open referral initiative for human services data specifications. We encourage this type of solution, which would take the platform to the next level with a new partner.

13. **Question:** There is concern that the funding isn't enough to assemble a team that can achieve the various objectives (technical, legal, organizational, and ethical) that "closed-loop referrals" entail, so can we build off the capacity of an existing effort?

**Response:** Yes, we see this as an opportunity to modernize and improve existing technology solutions that the networks already use. We recognize that states and hospitals/health systems have already invested in technology platforms. The idea is to promote synergy between the two to ensure data and information can be easily shared and to reduce the burden of CBOs having to manage multiple platforms to send/receive referrals to connect people to critical resources.

14. **Question:** Will the submissions remain the property of the groups who submit? If selected or not selected?

**Response:** The Federal Government has the authority to promote the ideas, solutions, and lessons learned beyond this Challenge, but the ultimate goal is national attention to this topic and replicating the valued solutions. We would be willing to also promote the solutions of teams that are not awarded.

As the federal agency, ACL has the right to request winners participate in a public announcement, though not necessarily to share the specific details of the solution. However, contestants in this Challenge competition must agree to be bound by the rules, accept that the decision of the judges are final and binding, and acknowledge that their submission may be the subject of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Contestants are responsible for identifying and marking all business-confidential and proprietary information in their submission.

15. **Question:** Are there any other relevant standards that applicants should consider aside from Gravity Project and bi-directional services and referrals?

**Response:** The IT 360X is another standard that uses CDA. However, when considering standards, please take into account both the terminology and technical workstreams, as the Gravity Project does.

16. **Question:** Is the Gravity Project an applicant to this or is the structure of other applicants need to be working within?

**Response:** The Gravity Project is developing a Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) implementation guide and a data definition, so it is the structure, not an applicant. As you are incorporating closed-loop referrals or e-referrals, consider representing the exchange in a standardized way. This is where the Gravity Project's guidance for data definitions and using FHIR based open APIs will come into play.

17. **Question:** What is the main goal of HSDA?

**Response:** Open Referral's Human Service Data API Suite (HSDA) addresses the problem of too many standards. It is designed to achieve interoperability across diverse, technological, and institutional contexts; it is not trying to "beat" the other standards.

18. **Question:** What referral platforms participated in the Gravity Project session for the compilation of referral components? Did they articulate a willingness for interoperability and are they going to be meeting again?

**Response:** Several referral platforms participated in the session, including UniteUs, Aunt Bertha, NowPow, and Open/City Labs. They did articulate willingness for interoperability and requested that we convene another session. The Gravity Project plans to do so on behalf of FHIR Technical build activities.

19. **Question:** Is there a schema.org link for Open Referral data elements or guidance?  
**Response:** Right now the schema option is available for legal aid programs and Open Referral is working to generalize that integration.
20. **Question:** Could submissions focus on a vulnerable population other than the elderly and individuals with disabilities?  
**Response:** Yes. Through this effort, we are looking for solutions that support all populations and all payers, whether they are an older adult, anyone with a disability, a Veteran, a caregiver, etc. The goal is that anyone moving through the health care system and in need of social care can be connected to the right community resources through a seamless process, without having to go through multiple systems. The population served would be up to the team and the organizations involved. Ultimately, *high-cost and high-need* populations will likely include older adults or individuals with disabilities.
21. **Question:** The measurable component with this opportunity is unclear. Is the "measurable" to create a database of community resources? Or is it to create a regional collaboration of service providers to serve people with disabilities? This seems very IT-specific.  
**Response:** The key measure is interoperability, which is relatively technical. However, from the organization perspective, this Challenge is really about business operations, how partnerships work, and strategies to determine how different organizations that have different systems can collaborate. A measurable piece could be the ability to successfully share information from one system to another. Consider how a partnership between organizations that previously competed, or at least did not collaborate, can be beneficial in a strategic and operational way.
22. **Question:** Does the Challenge seek referral systems that transfer personal health information or could it be only public information? Does the Challenge have any specific guidelines or regulations to ensure adherence to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)?  
**Response:** The type of referrals and data exchange will likely include public information with some type of individualized identifier. All legal and regulatory standards and privacy measures will need to be considered and addressed.
23. **Question:** To clarify, the focus is on the sharing data on resources, versus data about specific clients, correct?  
**Response:** The focus is on resource directory data and social determinants of health (SDOH) data exchange. However if appropriate considerations are made, specific client information may be shared or may be deemed necessary, depending on the parties involved. Also see the response to question #22.
24. **Question:** In addition to the directory of services, are you also interested in the privacy implications of sharing data between regulatory domains? For example, care teams that touch HIPAA, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and unregulated organizations?  
**Response:** This is a highly complex area and we recognize the importance of not only sharing data, but compliance with existing regulations. We are open to working with teams to address concerns. We recognize that there was HIPAA rulemaking that addressed information sharing with community-based organizations (CBOs), given that many CBOs do play a role in continuity of care and services. If there are issues related to FERPA or other regulations, we are willing to discuss clarity needed to ensure appropriate private and secure information sharing.

25. **Question:** Is there any need to consider how to connect information between healthcare providers, CBOs, and consumers?

**Response:** There are a number of considerations, including data content or messaging standard and the relationship between providers. In many cases, there could be a type of EHR outbound message going to the CBO, in which the referral notes could be embedded. Alternatively, there could be a pre-screen of needs at the healthcare level or an assessment at the level of the CBO. It can be highly variable depending on which partners you are working with and based on what works within the workflow and existing technology infrastructure and the populations they are serving.

Other things to consider are the sensitivity of the data and the need to respect privacy and confidentiality by giving individuals the option to opt in through data segmentation.

26. **Question:** Could you describe further how you believe organizations and individuals could benefit from the Challenge? What things could change? How could things change?

**Response:** The goal is to break down silos between the various referral platforms and resource directories that are currently in the market. We know that states, CBOs, hospitals, even health plans have invested in their own referral platforms and resource directories. There is a lack of standardization and a need to seamlessly exchange data to ensure informed decision making when connecting individuals to community resources to meet their needs in a person-centered way. We know of situations where 211 and another information referral system within a similar geography have a lot of overlap with the CBO receiving their referrals. It is important to have open infrastructure that allows for a current electronic account of all the community resources available to meet individuals' needs. Particularly during the pandemic, we want resources to be readily available and up-to-date. We are supporting the critically important thinking around the business model needed to maintain and encourage this change and keep it dynamically updated. Better quality data flow in a community at lower costs can be a measurable component to the success of this Challenge. When many organizations are using the same resource data across multiple systems, you can collect more robust analytics about who is searching for what services through which channels. That provides a broader array of insights into the needs of the community and the patterns of service delivery.

27. **Question:** Regarding project scope, if we design a scalable IT solution, but test it locally, do we use a business model to address a potentially larger scope?

**Response:** Yes, this is an appropriate approach. If the proposal is selected for Phase 2 or Phase 3, then the scale of implementation will be determined based on the team's capabilities and scope.

28. **Question:** Does the Challenge include pursuit of different agreements and costs associated with work to get csv files into a format that can be shared?

**Response:** Prize winners may use funds for such costs, however there are no additional funds being provided.

### Team Formation/Stakeholders/Partnerships Questions

29. **Question:** Can an individual or entity participate on more than one team?

**Response:** Yes, an individual and/or entity can participate on more than one team. Multiple entries are permitted. Each solution must be sufficiently novel and unique and not be a minor modification of a prior submission.

30. **Question:** Is participation on the team by state leaders required?  
**Response:** We believe that state health and human service leaders play an important role in successful health and social care integration, including the technical/IT component. However, we also know that state leaders are stretched in resources given the current COVID environment. Therefore, we would like to see that state leaders are involved, but do not expect them to be leading the team. This decision is ultimately up to the team leader.
31. **Question:** Are there different levels in which teams can collaborate on a proposal? For instance, how would cross team collaborations clarify who is the lead?  
**Response:** The team collaboration page, found at <https://socialcare.innovationchallenge.com/teams>, can be a space to collaborate with other teams and communicate with each other to potentially work as one team. It is up to the partners to designate the team lead.
32. **Question:** Will you consider funding a collaborative that is taking steps towards interoperability, but need funds to evaluate or are you looking for brand-new partnerships?  
**Response:** Yes. This Challenge does not require new partnerships.
33. **Question:** Is 211 already an available partner?  
**Response:** A regional United Way 211 provider has registered for this Challenge. Please reach out to ACL for more information.

## Phase 1 Questions

34. **Question:** For the online application entry form, do the character limits for each question include spaces?  
**Response:** Yes, the character limits include spaces. Generally, each question box is about two pages' worth of text.
35. **Question:** Will Phase 1 prizes will be given out as proposals are submitted on a rolling basis or will ACL wait until December to review all proposals at the same time?  
**Response:** Proposals can be submitted at any time. However, the evaluation and the judging of all submissions will happen at once. We will evaluate all submissions that we receive by the December 14th due date and plan to announce the award winners in January.
36. **Question:** Is sustainability one of the evaluation metrics during review of Phase 1 submissions?  
**Response:** The judging criteria does not address sustainability. However, considerations for a sustainable, open business model is a part of understanding that the proposal is forward thinking and scalable.

37. **Question:** For the Phase 1 submission, judging criteria, #3 and #4 are focused on scalability, feasibility and product functionality. How detailed should teams be in addressing these criteria at this Phase?

**Response:** For the Phase 1 submission, ACL is looking for an understanding of how the team of stakeholders submitting a solution are committed to, if not already, adopting the open API and standard SDOH content approaches described in judging criteria #3 and how or if the specific functionalities listed in judging criteria #4 will be incorporated in the ultimate solution. An understanding of how these functionalities are or will be incorporated in the proposed solution can also be included in the description of the use cases or the technical workflows that teams may upload as attachments in order to describe how these functions can be demonstrated or implemented when

## Phase 2 Questions

38. **Question:** What kind of demo are you expecting Challenge participants to deliver in Phase 2? For example, a demo could be as simple as a slide deck with animation and team member role playing, or it could be an actual software demo.

**Response:** We generally anticipate the demo being a little bit of both—actual software demos (with the assumption that most of the solutions submitted will build off of existing technology platforms, so there would be some portion to visually demo) and a presentation of any other technical details added to enhance the project. Challenge competitions are very flexible in that we will be able to collaboratively work with the teams that move forward to Phase 2 to identify what is practical.

39. **Question:** For the Phase 2 demo, are you looking for demos that are more about the technology, use of standards, etc., or about the end user workflows, without regard to the technology? I ask this question because a key purpose of the Challenge is to promote the development of standards-based solutions.

**Response:** The standards-based adoption and use will be a key component of Phase 2., You can learn more about this from the [July 28<sup>th</sup> webinar recording](#). However, we fully understand that standards use does not happen overnight, so we anticipate providing some technical assistance to the teams that move forward to Phase 2. We would ideally also like to see a demo or presentation of the user workflows and overall technology enhancements in Phase 2.

40. **Question:** What is the size and scale expected of the prototype?

**Response:** We will work with Phase 2 winners to identify the appropriate size and scale for demonstration and implementation based on the solution’s capabilities and considerations for all stakeholders involved. This detail has not been finalized yet.

41. **Question:** When we get to Phase 2, is it required that the technology be at a pre-pilot, demo stage by early January 2021?

**Response:** No, a demo will not be required until the end of Phase 2, which is June of 2021. The five-month period for Phase 2 can be used to develop the system for demonstration and the five-month period in Phase 3 will be used to prepare for implementation and testing.

42. **Question:** Could you share more about the Phase 2 timeline - when would you expect proofs of concept and demonstrations to be provided should we be selected to move on to that phase?

**Response:** Demonstrations for Phase 2 will not occur until June of 2021. See question #40 response.

43. **Question:** Will there be awards after the \$30,000 in Phase 2?

**Response:** Yes, three winners will be selected to move on to Phase 3 of the competition. One final prize winner will receive \$140,000 or more. See question #2 response for additional detail on award amounts.

44. **Question:** Will Phase 2 and Phase 3 be more for developing working prototypes or will it also be fine tuning more on the architecture and design?

**Response:** Phase 2 and Phase 3 will be for both, depending on the scope and structure of the proposed solutions that are selected from Phase 1. The timeframe between each phase will allow for improving the architecture and design to ensure the best demonstration.