

Collaborative Approach to Better Respond to Sexual Violence of Individuals with I/DD

Selected Applicant: UA Sonoran Center; \$75,000

Background on RFGA:

Since 2018, ADDPC and its statewide network of collaborators have worked to improve awareness of and response to sexual violence against the I/DD population, as well as to identify effective means of preventing incidents of sexual violence from occurring. Still, national and local studies reveal significant gaps that undermine the health and safety of the I/DD population. More must be done to provide a clear understanding of how the state's legislation, regulations, and network of services and support can prevent and respond to sexual violence toward people with I/DD. In addition, more information regarding supportive services must be made available to individuals with I/DD who are actual or potential victims of the epidemic of sexual violence.

As reference to this grant solicitation, the Applicant is encouraged to download and read the report: <https://sonorancenter.arizona.edu/research/untold-stories-about-sexual-violence>

"Sexual Violence Told Through Lived Experiences of Survivors, Families, and Professionals: The Impact of Sexual Violence on People with I/DD". The report is released by the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities; Prepared by Lynne Tomasa, PhD, MSW, FAAIDD, from the University of Arizona Department of Family and Community Medicine Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities.

There are four required objectives, developed to be a system change project, and the applicant can be renewed upon successful completion of four key objectives:

1. Create a committee that will develop a strategic plan to coordinate a sexual violence awareness campaign. Members should be from a diverse group of stakeholders, to include, but not limited to, self-advocates, family members, Arizona's Protection & Advocacy organization (Disability Rights Arizona), Adult Protective Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities, law enforcement and judicial systems, healthcare (behavioral and physical), educational institutions and IDD advocacy organizations.
2. Review existing resources developed by the Arizona Sexual Violence and Disability Network, Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (ACESDV), and other entities. Then, create an inventory of updated and new resources that can be adapted for specific audiences. All resources shall be created in plain language and culturally appropriate for the audience, including resources in both English and Spanish.
3. Identify and address, at the systems level, at least two policies that need to be developed (new) and/or enhanced to support individuals with I/DD who have been victims of sexual violence. Policies should also address impacts on victims'/survivors' families.
4. Engage with policymakers and elected officials to propose new policy changes that will strengthen existing laws for the prevention of abuse and neglect, proper reporting, and investigating allegations of sexual violence toward individuals with I/DD. Legislation need not be enacted by the end of the contract period, but effort must be shown that the Applicant is actively pursuing policy change.

Objective 1:

The Sonoran Center submitted a comprehensive proposal that addressed the four requirements. In year one, they will organize, facilitate, and work closely with the committee to develop a strategic plan. This committee will focus on the development of a sexual violence awareness campaign that can lead to the next step of an action campaign. The committee will review successful and unsuccessful campaigns, take a multi-layered approach, understand the audience targeted, and collaborate with embedded networks and community partnerships.

By November 2024, a 26-member committee will be formed, and members will be selected based on their expertise, experience, and commitment to the cause. The Sonoran Center provided a criteria list to be on the committee, which includes:

- Demonstrated experience or commitment to disability advocacy and/or sexual violence risk reduction.
- Professional or personal background in relevant fields.
- Lived experience as a victim/survivor of abuse, exploitation, and neglect.
- Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion principles.
- Ability to contribute time and resources to committee activities. The committee is expected to meet monthly over Zoom.

The committee will be tasked with several responsibilities, to include Campaign Development; Reviewing and Creating New Materials; Community Engagement/Partnerships; and Organizing Events and Activities to share information; and Evaluating Progress. The Sonoran Center staff have been identified in key roles to work with the committee and several working groups and have responsibility for monitoring and documenting all work.

Objective 2:

The Sonoran Center will maintain all resources in a centralized, online repository hosted on their website. This repository will be easily navigable and searchable. They will also incorporate user feedback through online surveys, feedback forms at events, focus groups, and direct outreach to stakeholders. This will allow the identification of common themes, suggestions, and areas for improvement. Materials will also be developed in plain language and are culturally appropriate and understandable. The Sonoran Center will conduct focus groups with target audiences to test the clarity and cultural appropriateness of materials before finalizing them. Employ professional translators and cultural consultants to create resources in Spanish and adapt them to be culturally relevant.

Objective 3:

In Dr. Tomasa's research report, it was clear that the identification, reporting, and response to sexual violence was severely inadequate and there was a lack of information and training on multiple levels. The Sonoran Center's proposal identified two policies.

- 1) Mandatory and optional training for DDD vendors and staff, support coordinators, and IOC committee members, and community organizations.
- 2) AHCCCS and DDD Incident Flowchart Assessment.

The policies were chosen because they represent significant processes that systems use to measure performance. The impact and outcomes for the individuals served may not be clearly defined. The community may not fully understand where gaps and improvements can be made.

Systems and administrators understand what works with their available resources but may not be asking the questions that can lead to improvements. An outside review may be helpful.

Training in foundational principles and skills is necessary for all staff and organizations that provide support to individuals with I/DD and families. Specific competencies need to be identified, tracked, and evaluated. Regular training on broader but related topics is necessary. Training must be engaging and provide opportunities for feedback. Some examples of additional training include how to engage in conversations that build trust, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), how past and current trauma is expressed behaviorally and verbally.

Objective 4:

As lobbying is prohibited by ADDPC contractors, the primary role that the Sonoran Center can assume is to support the statewide efforts of organizations whose expertise lies in these areas. They include ADDPC, ACESDV, DRAZ, The Arc of Arizona, Southwest Institute for Families and Children, and the Arizona Sexual Violence and Disability Network. They can provide support through researching relevant background information, examining successful strategies and outcomes, and identification of useful resources to support the efforts of these organizations.

Objective 5:

The Sonoran Center identified a fifth objective to ensure expansion and training to students. They will collaborate with academic programs and colleges and universities that train future behavioral health, public health policy, and direct service providers in integrating sexual violence and I/DD into existing curriculum. By partnering with staff and faculty within the University, the Sonoran Center has the potential to reach hundreds of students who can utilize this knowledge in their future careers. This could make a significant impact on the future of how individuals with I/DD are treated, educated, and protected from sexual violence.

The proposal had minor clarifications to respond to. The budget supports the activities, and key staff are experienced in this work. If approved, the project will begin October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025.

The evaluation committee approved the proposal with the clarification to the ADDPC.