Preapplication call for the Laboratory Efficiencies Initiative (LEI) Supplemental, NPHII

**Monday, August 5, 2013**

**Today’s Speakers**:

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Bobbie Erlwein, CDC/OSTLTS

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**Laura (Operator):** Welcome and thank you all for holding. I’d like to remind all parties that your lines are on a listen-only mode until the question and answer segment of today’s conference. You may ask questions at that time by pressing star one and recording your name when prompted. Also, this call is being recorded; if you have any objections please disconnect at this time. I would now like to turn the call over to Harald Pietz. Sir, you may begin.

**Harald Pietz:** Thank you. Hi, I’m Harald Pietz. I’m the Chief for the Health Department and Systems Development Branch where the National Public Health Improvement Initiative is housed. I’m happy to be able to host this preapplication assistance call regarding the Laboratories Efficiencies Initiative or the LEI supplemental to the National Public Health Improvement Initiative (or NPHII). With me today to discuss the initiative are colleagues from OSELS, now called CSELS or the Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Support, as well as members of the NPHII team here in OSTLTS. With us from CSELS are Drs. John Ridderhof, Tony Moulton, and Rene Ned who have been working hard across CDC and externally on the wider aspects of the Laboratory Efficiency Initiative that this particular supplemental is but a small part of. First, we will go over the supplemental then, we’ll open up for questions and answers. This call will be recorded and posted to the PIM Network website at [www.cdc.gov/stltpublichealth/pimnetwork/events.html](http://www.cdc.gov/stltpublichealth/pimnetwork/events.html). For any questions that require follow up after this call, the answers will be distributed via the PIM listserv and other email mechanisms. At this point, let me hand off the call to Dr. John Ridderhof. John?

**John Ridderhof:** Thank you. One, I’d like to thank all our NPHII colleagues here and let me just say a few words for folks who work with NPHII and are not in the laboratory, this is all components of the Laboratory Efficiencies Initiative. This was an initiative that was requested by Dr. Frieden with specific focus on sustaining public health testing in the states and the localities because we all share the same public health laboratory system. This is one component; there’s been many forms since this has been very stakeholder driven and we recognize shared services is a big dialogue within public health, within the laboratory community there has been the desire for state directed test sharing. So, this is really an evaluation project. In which, I should mention our key partner is really APHL in this endeavor. APHL is also listening in and they are supporting this and will be engaged with this project. I think our intent is to allow the most possible time for any questions, so I will stop there and turn it back over to our NPHII colleagues to initiate any of the questions over the lines.

**Harald Pietz:** Thanks, John. Anyone else in the room? Questions? Great. Okay, Laura, if you will open it up for any questions and answers we may have. We do want to make maximum use of the time we have to answer any preapplication calls or questions.

**Laura:** Certainly, at this time if you would have a question on the phone lines, please press star 1 on the touch pad of your phone; you will be prompted to record your name. Please be sure your line is unmuted and speak your name clearly for when I introduce your question. Star 1, please. We’ll be just a few moments for the first questions to register.

Once again, star 1 if you have a question, please.

**Harald Pietz:** So while we’re waiting for those calls, we did get one or two questions in via email. So, we’ll go ahead and clear that out while people are considering their questions. Bobbie?

**Bobbie Erlwien:** One of the questions we got before the call says that the FOA states that applicants must include 1) confirmation of consortium participation, 2) the identification of the types of test services the applicant and its consortium partners propose to evaluate for test sharing, and 3) other information specified in this announcement. The question is specific to the phrase “confirmation of consortium participation” and the question is does that language mean we must be part of an existing consortium or have agreements from partners forming a consortium at the time of application or does it mean something else?

Would someone like to answer that one?

**Tony Moulton**: I’ll take a try at that. This is Tony Moulton with the LS3PO-LEI team. Thanks very much for the question. I think the question seems to be based on a reading of the executive summary that appears in the funding opportunity announcement and it would be helpful for all of us to also look at the specific requirements for applications, that’s under the heading, “content and form of application submission” and there’s a more helpful amplification of the relevant statement there and I’ll just read that and then maybe make a couple of comments on that. This is under that heading, “content and form of application submission” and says the narrative should address activities to be conducted over the entire project period and must include the following eight items. I’m not going to read all eight, for which everyone will be thankful. But the first one says a statement of consortium participation and scope shared services and then there’s a sub-A that says a statement by the chief executive officer of the applicant entity confirming that the applicant will join or has joined a public health laboratory consortium for the purpose of assessing planning and potentially implementing shared test services with other members of the consortium and there’s a pretty important phrase that’s in parentheses in that point that says, “each member of a proposed consortium must submit a separate application for support under this funding opportunity.” I think the comment on that would be that the confirmatory statement need not confirm the consortium exists, and has a charter and has formal membership, per se. It would suffice for the statement to say that the applicant intends to join or will join, if indeed there is not a consortium in place at the moment. The purpose there was to recognize that in fact some intrastate laboratory consortia do exist, but in many other parts of the country they do not exist. Some exist in a formal manner; some exist in an informal manner. This is intended to be a big tent approach, not to be too onerous and demanding, but the parenthesized section that I just mentioned, “each member of a proposed consortium must submit a separate application” is very important. There’s something that we might have added to that as sort of a codicil is it would certainly be to the benefit of the applicant for the individual members who are thinking about forming a consortium or may have done so, to coordinate the preparation and even the writing and language of their individual applications. That would give greater strength and greater appreciation on CDC’s part that an individual application, in fact, is intended to be part of a group activity after the awards are made, a shared plan essentially.

**Harald Pietz:** Thank you, Tony. Have any questions queued up?

**Laura:** Yes, we do have a question from Christine Bean. Your line is open.

**Christine Bean:** Hi, this is Christine from New Hampshire. So, on that same vein of thought about the application process and the awarding of funds and management of the award. Each state would apply individually and would somehow, identify in the application that the intent is that you are part of a bigger group and write that in. Each of the four to seven states would have an individual application?

**Harald Pietz:** That is correct, yes.

**Christine Bean:** Okay, thank you.

**Harald Pietz:** Thank you.

**Laura:** And we have no further questions on the phone lines.

**Harald Pietz:** Any other points that we want to make sure of?

**Bobbie Erlwein:** This is Bobbie. I’d like to just chime in. I work with the NPHII program and I would mention that it would be very helpful if you would be very explicit about who you’re partnering with in your application, that’s my first comment on that. The other thing that would be very helpful is if you would speak directly to the fact that you have a lab and meet the laboratory requirements specified in the FOA and that you do that perhaps on your cover letter, that would be a great place. Some place that would be very easy for us to find, it will help with the application review process. Ebony, did I cover that correctly?

**Ebony:** Yes, that’s correct.

**Bobbie Erlwein:** That would be hugely helpful for us and we’d be grateful. Thank you.

**Laura:** We do have a couple more questions, would you like to take those?

**Harald Pietz:** Yes, please.

**Laura:** One moment please. Pragathi Tummala from Arizona, your line is open.

**Pragathi Tummala:** Hi Bobbie, how are you?

**Bobbie Erlwein:** Good, how are you doing?

**Pragathi Tummala:** Good, just a couple of things. Each state is submitting their own application and we currently in Arizona do have a consortium in place with the four corner states. Would each separate state application be awarded separately, is question one?

**Bobbie Erlwein:** Yes, that answer would be yes.

**Pragathi Tummala:** Yes, okay. And would the grant also have the built in TA that our current NPHII grant has, say we needed additional assistance from another federal partner?

**Bobbie Erlwein:** So that’s a great question. The vision, of course, is for some technical support to be provided by our experts in the laboratory program, but it really depends on exactly what you’re proposing and where it fits in your NPHII work plan, so clearly this supplemental fits the goals and the scope of NPHII, so I wouldn’t say that it’s impossible for us to draw on some of the NPHII resources, but it probably would be very dependent on the question and exactly how it fit on your NPHII work plan.

**Pragathi Tummala:** Okay, and does this new supplemental proposal have to tie into our existing NPHII work plan or can it be a separate initiative all together?

**Bobbie Erlwein:** It can absolutely be a separate initiative and it might be more clean if you do it as a separate initiative with very focused goals. But, those goals relate very well to what we’re trying to do under NPHII otherwise we couldn’t offer this as a supplement. Colleagues in the room wanted to get some clarification to my earlier remark about where technical assistance would come from so let us add to that answer a little.

**Harald Pietz:** This is Harald Pietz. The aspect of this supplemental is that it is a stand-alone FOA and it will have its own reporting requirements, etc. and we are not funding any of the partners to do any type of laboratory work, but as we’re funding our partners within NPHII to do quality improvement work and other systems that they do, they could apply that request through the PIM standard TA approach to assist with it, but they wouldn’t be able to provide the technical aspects within the lab because they’re not really geared towards lab. That may be a better fit for APHL or our colleagues. Suffice to say, if you have TA requests associated with this or the normal NPHII program, we would like to field those TA requests through your PO, and we will task those out to the appropriate resource to respond to that TA request.

**Pragathi Tummala:** Okay, thanks, that makes sense.

**John Ridderhof:** I’m going to add too on this, this is John Ridderhof. There is the discussion of informatics and we do not have any of the specifics here, but we do have a commitment from APHL and one or two of our programs to look at realigning some of the program-focused technical support for the informatics. That’s about all we can say. We don’t have specifics on what that would translate into to each state, but that would be a focus of the work here.

**Pragathi Tummala:** Okay, thank you.

**Harald Pietz:** Did that help?

**Pragathi Tummala:** Yes, and then just one other question. I noticed that this is a one-year funded opportunity with a fixed amount of funding, are you expecting us to report actual QI improvements within one year?

**Harald Pietz:** This is Harald and I’ll take the first shot at that. I think what we would like to see is that the consortium is formed and functional and has the prerequisite agreements to do that. And we think if you can get that part of it that would be great, kind of on a minimal level. And then obviously for those who are well advanced in this work and have the opportunities already there, any evidence of tech sharing and the linking of the electronic data transmission would certainly be good evidence for supporting the objectives of this particular supplement.

**John Ridderhof:** I would add, this is John Ridderhof again, for people to understand the history, this is also based on what we’ve learned, and through a lot of CDC research there’s at least one region that meets routinely, they do so on their own resources, and this is New England, because they’ve found the value in meeting regularly, maybe quarterly on that. There’s also the Northern Plains consortium which was able to form using just some small original seed money from CDC core project. And they used that as a spring board to determine how they could collaborate in the future. As we understand this, this is one reason we’re not looking at perhaps huge sums of funding, but more seed money to initiate this.

**Laura:** Our next question comes from Jill Taylor, your line is open.

**Jill Taylor:** Thank you. As I read the instructions, clearly one of the requests is to demonstrate test sharing for at least one reportable infectious disease but there is other wording that is a bit more general about sharing testing services. Does this apply for environmental testing as well, or just infectious diseases?

**John Ridderhof:** Hi, Jill, this is John. Thank you for asking that and I do think we would specify that we put in notifiable, but that was not intended to be restricted to infectious diseases.

**Jill Taylor:** Okay, that’s helpful.

**Laura:** And we have no further questions.

**Harald Pietz:** Thanks all; we’ll just give it a few more minutes and see if there are any other qualifying points around the program or if anyone would like to add any thoughts?

**Bobbie Erlwien:** Well, if there is a lull in the action, you know I can’t just help myself from talking. And I would just reiterate the importance of working together; it just advances your application. I think it’s imperative that you coordinate and collaborate and get those applications lined up before you submit. Just to hit that point one more time.

**Harald Pietz:** I’m going to presume that the FOA was really informative and not generating a lot of questions. To the point raised earlier, this supplement is just for twelve months, a 12 month budget period and 12 month project period, like everything else it will be dependent on funding and we’ll see what next year brings. As we go into year five of NPHII, we’re very happy to be working with our CSELS colleagues to be able to use this NPHII mechanism to supplement this effort. I find that working with John, Tony, and Rene with working on the LEI and parts of it and always thought it was an excellent fit for NPHII, especially as they promote the use of Lean methodologies within the lab and other types of QI and certainly the cross-jurisdictional sharing aspect resonates largely with program objectives of NPHII. So it wasn’t a stretch by any imagination to make the connection between the programs. As always, everything is in the details in making things work within the decisions that we have. If there are no further questions?

**Laura:** Excuse me sir, we have had another question pop up. Pragathi Tummala from Arizona, your line is open.

**Pragathi Tummala:** Hi, since there’s no other questions, I thought I might just ask a general one. Can you provide some insight to us, can you give some examples of the types of projects that you are envisioning that we can do, as labs, toward this initiative.

**John Ridderhof:** This is John. One, I would refer you to something on the APHL website, there’s an LEI website. We have references, one is a practical guide that we have collected a lot of information on some of the test service sharing between states, such as the Northern Plains consortium example I shared earlier. One is where they worked out reciprocal test sharing, but if you look to the language it’s not restricted to that. Some of these sites found that four states could be more effective than one working alone and they shared training workshops and survey development between the states. So, now there’s now a focus on test sharing and service sharing in general within public health but we think there would be other examples in other areas where a consortium or group of states could be much more effective acting collectively.

**Pragathi Tummala:** That’s great. It would just be helpful for us to hear the types of things that have been done within one year, for this amount of money, what you really see us being able to do with this. Thank you, that is helpful.

**John Ridderhof:** Two things. One is just a clarification; I think people are presuming we don’t really stipulate that they all have to be contiguous states, even though that would be very natural for people to work with their neighbors and that they would have existing agreements. Another thing would just to emphasize the language there that this is intended to strengthen and provide evidence to all of our programs so we have made a point of meeting with representatives of the programs, informing them of the intent, sending copies of the FOA and we tend to include them. So, don’t think this has to be separate from those programmatic efforts. This really is supposed to be synergistic with those falling under the LRN, ELC, and so on.

**Harald Pietz:** Great, thank you for that question. Any other questions?

**Laura:** No sir, there are not.

**Harald Pietz:** We’ll give it just a few more moments. I just wanted to say that as your applications come in, it’s good to identify who you’re going to be partnering with and informing your consortium. We want to be really clear about how important that is for us as we look at the applications. While each public health lab will be funded independently, the issue that we’re trying to push is for the labs to come together to form the consortiums and those that are well versed in their applications and have that these are the folks that we’ll be teaming with and these are the activities we’re looking to do or explore. But certainly take this as an opportunity to look at the feasibility of forming these types of consortia with their respective laboratories. We understand some of this may be start-up or exploration and some of this money can be used to put into existing consortia to strengthen their other work. It does run a nice continuum of supporting cross-jurisdictional sharing in the laboratory community. If there are follow up questions, please reach out to your POs, or you can reach out to Bobbie Erlwein or John Ridderhof; their contact information is included in the FOA. I’d like to thank everyone for the opportunity to share information on this call. We look forward to really great applications and to get this award out in a timely fashion. Any last words?

**John Ridderhof:** Thank you to our NPHII colleagues and hopefully this also will be a good bridge at the state and local level.

**Harald Pietz:** Great, we’ll check with Laura one last time. Any questions?

**Laura:** No sir, there are not.

**Harald Pietz:** Just a follow up, we will post this recording as soon as we can. It will be on the PIM Network website. I don’t have any outstanding questions, so we won’t have any follow up there. Just short of the hour we will adjourn this call. Thank you.

**Laura:** Thank you. That does conclude today’s presentation. Thank you all for joining. You may now disconnect.