

Access and Visitation

Name of the grant: Access and Visitation Grants to States

Length of grant: Each grant is an annual grant. Each state must reapply each year. The statute does not limit the number of years in the grant program. We are currently in year 4 of the grants.

Purpose of the Grant:

42 USC 469b states “The Administration for Children and Families shall make grants under this section to enable States to establish and administer programs to support and facilitate non-custodial parents’ access to and visitation of their children by means of activities including mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement (including monitoring, supervision and neutral drop-off and pickup) and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements.”

Eligible recipients: 42 USC 669b states:

“Each State to which a grant is made under this section -
(1) may administer State programs funded with the grant, directly or through grants to or contracts with courts, local public agencies, or nonprofit private entities;
(2) shall not be required to operate such programs on a statewide basis....”

Reporting Requirements:

The programs receiving grants will submit quarterly and summary reports.

Quarterly reports shall include the following:

- the number of participants served;
- the specific services provided (number of services and number of participants receiving them);
- the funds expended;
- progress towards meeting performance measures;
- narrative which addresses the progress towards meeting individual participant outcomes;
- narrative that addresses the progress toward meeting project outcomes.

Summary Report includes totals from the quarterly reports for the number served, expenditure of funds, and type of services provided. The report is also to include a comparison of the proposed results, outcomes, and performance measures and the actual results, outcomes and performance measures achieved. A narrative should include the identified strengths of the program, recommended changes in policy or practice or modifications to the project plan.

Funding level: The statute provides that "the allotment of a State for a fiscal year is the amount that bears the same ratio to \$10,000,000 ... as the number of children in the State living with only 1 biological parent bears to the total number of such children in all States. The minimum grant was set at \$50,000 for 1997 or 1998, and \$100,000 for "any succeeding year".

Federal: The federal portion may not exceed 90% of the total expenditure up to the total grant allotment.

State match: States must provide at least 10% of project funding even if they do not spend their entire allotment. (from the grant announcement)

Goal: Our goal is to secure a state and community understanding of the importance of non-custodial parents in the lives of children. We are seeking a comprehensive approach that addresses the barriers to fathers providing support to children. Those barriers are thought to include: lack of employment or the skills necessary to secure employment, a problem in the relationship with the custodial parent and perhaps a large child support delinquency. Services might include employment related services, visitation, neutral exchange, mediation, father support groups, parenting skills, and help in understanding the law. In addition there is a need to be sure that the public is aware of the difficulties children who live in single parent households encounter.

Grants: DHS sought and funded proposals from empowerment and decategorization entries that proposed community collaborative with government and private non-profits. Three entities will be providing a/v services this year within the local government grants. Those providers are:
the Siouxland Human Investment Program (a Woodbury County Empowerment, the Polk County decategorization, and Howard/Allamakee/Winneshiek/Clayton County.

Iowa's Children...Love Them...Support Them
Parental Obligation Pilot Projects
For SFY 00 and 01

Since state fiscal year 1998, the General Assembly has allocated TANF block grant money which is combined with federal Access and Visitation Grant funds to establish pilot projects to address barriers experienced by non-custodial parents, and assist them in meeting their responsibilities to provide emotional and financial support to their children. The funding is to be used to implement local strategies to keep both parents involved with their children. In addition, child support payment incentives are provided for participants.

The applicants, at a minimum, needed to include service components of assessment, neutral exchange sites for children during visitation and/or mediation of visitation issues, job training/job placement/job coaching, mentoring and public awareness in addition to monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Only Decategorization Projects or Empowerment Boards could be applicants.

The following projects were successful applicants in 2000 and have received awards of \$50,000 each:

- Howard/Allamakee/Winneshiek/Clayton County (HAWC): This project will provide assessment and referral services as part of developing a "family plan", transportation and support to children who are involved with the Children in the Middle program, stipends to parents for completing the classes, a neutral exchange program, and family mentoring.
- Siouxland Human Investment Program (SHIP): This project will provide job-related training/mentoring services, mediation services, neutral exchange, mentoring and assessment services.
- Polk County Decategorization: This project will expand to offer a number of additional services as part of a much larger "Fostering Male Involvement" project. This project is funded from a variety of sources, only one of which is this grant. The activities funded under this grant include supervised visitation, family mediation, neutral exchange sites, fatherhood support groups, parent/child activities, and a public awareness campaign.

The following projects were funded in 1999:

- Cass/Mills/Montgomery County Decategorization: This project, in a very rural area, includes post-divorce/post-relationship classes to discuss a variety of parenting issues with both parents; fatherhood seminars – group meetings to discuss a wide variety of topics; Saturday with My Dad – parent/child activities; and public awareness activities.
- Muscatine County Decategorization: This project, in a mid-sized county with a mix of rural and light industry, includes a neutral exchange site where children can be safely exchanged for a visit with the noncustodial parent; comprehensive case planning and referral for all participants; a wide variety of supervised father/child activities including fatherhood groups and parent skills training; and public awareness activities.
- Pottawattamie County Decategorization: This project, in a more metropolitan area includes providing in-home assessments for fathers; individual support for fathers; support groups; father/child activities; mediation for parents; and public awareness activities.
- Polk County Decategorization: This project in Des Moines, includes providing neutral exchange sites, supervised visitation, and mediation services on a sliding fee scale, partially underwritten by grant funds.