

To: Sylvia Pauling

From: NOLA SEA Project

Date: December 18, 2020

**Re: Focus Memorandum – Grant No. 2019-FW-AX-K009**

In accordance with the urgent need to increase the victim service providers’ responsiveness and accessibility to domestic violence and sexual assault survivors of all communities, a multidisciplinary collaboration was founded in the Greater New Orleans region with the support of the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) Disability Grant Program in 2019, which will guide the coordination mechanism amongst four (4) community-based service organizations: Disability Rights Louisiana, Lighthouse Louisiana, Metro Centers for Community Advocacy and New Orleans Family Justice Center. The multidisciplinary collaboration, referred to as the NOLA SEA (Safety, Empowerment, Access) Project, therefore, will work towards the enhancement of services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who are Deaf, blind and/or are living with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

**Vision Statement**

The NOLA SEA Project envisions that every person, living in the Greater New Orleans region, is safe and empowered with the resources and tools they need to thrive without barriers or restrictions. We envision a service delivery system that is responsive to different needs and fully accessible to all survivors equally.

Our vision conceives an informed and supportive community where every survivor is able to express their own choices freely and confidently. The partnership envisions a continuous collaboration that drives parallel improvement in both safety and accessibility. It ensures a healthier and inclusive environment where the survivor is the decision maker and has complete access to every service that supports their choices.

**Mission Statement**

Our mission is to center the needs of DV and SA survivors who are Deaf (D), blind and/or are living with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), in order to increase partner agencies’ knowledge and capability to serve them by:

Engaging in rigorous self-exploration by:

• Conducting a needs assessments of NOLA SEA Project partner agencies;

• Identifying gaps in services for DV and SA who may have intellectual and/or

developmental disabilities, as well as survivors who are Deaf and/or blind;

• Reviewing our organizational procedures and policies to increase survivor-centered

services, based on an empowerment model that is trauma-informed as well as ethnically,

linguistically and culturally responsive; and

• Building an atmosphere of mutual trust.

Learning and cross training by:

• Leveraging the expertise of collaboration members;

• Promoting strategic communication and education of topics related to DV, SA, Deaf and

blind culture, and IDD services; and

• Expand cross-organizational communication and openness toward embracing further

responsive practices and knowledge sharing.

**Collaboration Partners**

The NOLA SEA Project partnership includes four (4) agencies: Disability Rights Louisiana, Lighthouse Louisiana, Metro Centers for Community Advocacy, and New Orleans Family Justice Center. Each of the NOLA SEA Project’s partner organizations bring a unique perspective and expertise to the collaboration.

*Disability Rights Louisiana* (known as the Advocacy Center until January 2020) provides direct legal and non-legal representation, education, training, and systems advocacy. Their current priorities are improving the accessibility of services, facilities, and housing for people with disabilities; preserving or increasing autonomy; increasing access to equal education; ensuring competitive employment; preserving home and community-based healthcare services; investigating allegations of abuse and neglect in institutional settings; and advocating for voting.

*Lighthouse Louisiana* is the largest and longest running disability service provider in the state of Louisiana. The Lighthouse offers a range of services for individuals who are blind, low vision, Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind.

*Metro Centers for Community Advocacy* provides wrap-around services to survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in eight (8) Louisiana parishes. The agency takes a trauma-informed approach to all of its services, including individual advocacy, legal advocacy, sheltering, information and referrals, group support, safety planning, and caregiver support.

*New Orleans Family Justice Center* is a partnership of agencies dedicated to ending domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking through prevention and a coordinated response by providing comprehensive client-centered, empowerment services in a single location.

**Disability Grant Progress**

The NOLA SEA Project Collaboration Charter has been completed and was submitted to OVW for review on October 6, 2020 and was approved on October 20, 2020. We began meeting virtually as a collaboration on April 8, 2020, and we meet weekly for two hours. Our project director meets weekly with our TA provider at Vera, monthly with our Finance Director at Lighthouse Louisiana, we attend all TA events, and OVW training.

**Our Focus Population**

The initial project proposal stated the focus population area to be individuals with sensory disabilities including people who are blind, visually impaired, Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind, and individuals with intellectual, developmental, physical, and mental health disabilities who were survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. However, during the establishment of the NOLA SEA Project Collaboration Charter, and after the virtual site visit conducted by the technical assistance provider, Vera Institute of Justice, the collaboration found that by narrowing the focus population we could target our resources in a concerted effort to ensure our ultimate goals are more attainable and feasible to achieve. Therefore, the NOLA SEA Project agreed by consensus to focus on survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who are blind Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind as well as survivors living with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

**Capacity to Create Change**

All four partner agencies have shown the ability to fulfill the goals of this partnership and create change within their organizations. Decision makers in each organization remain involved through key team members from each organization. Each organization is excited to make lasting changes together, in a trauma-informed and culturally-responsive service mechanism that ensures equality and equity to all.