

payment, or healthy marriages for unwed parents, reducing out-of wedlock births for older teens and young adults who are not parents. We are looking for projects which educate the public on their parental responsibilities and about strictly enforced child support enforcement policies if they have a child outside of marriage or if they separate or divorce. Since many States have already developed outreach videos or materials, we are not looking for projects to develop these tools. Projects would use child support workers to educate low-income, unwed parents, or older teens and young adults who are not parents, about child support enforcement policies and parental financial responsibilities when a child is born outside of marriage or a marriage breaks up. Research also generally suggests that strong child support enforcement encourages families to form, stay together, or avoid conceiving a child out of wedlock. In addition, many unwed parents, especially at the time of their child's birth may be thinking about the possibility of marriage. However, they may lack knowledge about and understanding of the importance of child support, family stability, and healthy marriage in the lives of their children. OCSE envisions that child support workers would provide information to unwed couples at pre-natal clinics, hospitals, faith-based and community-based organizations, etc. Projects might also coordinate with schools, community-based and faith-based organizations where older teens and young adults congregate in the community. The presentations would cover current automated enforcement tools such as automated wage withholding, tax offset, and driver's license suspension, to enhance the public's understanding of current child support enforcement mechanisms as well as the financial and emotional impact of having children outside of marriage. We expect that people hearing about the child support enforcement program from the workers who have first-hand knowledge of parents' child support concerns should help reinforce for parents who may be considering marriage, the benefits of healthy marriage, or help persuade others not to conceive children outside of marriage.

**Funding:** A total \$200,000 is anticipated to be available for projects in this priority area and OCSE anticipates funding two grants of approximately \$100,000 each.

**Budget Period:** For Priority Area 2, the budget period will be up to 17 months.

**Priority Area 3: Encouraging More Timely and Appropriate Order Modifications**

Projects would develop guidelines/procedures for modifying child support orders in a more timely and efficient manner. Under section 467 of the Social Security Act, states must review orders every three years at the request of either parent, or at the request of the state child support agency. In addition to using cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) that alter orders periodically without reviews, States can also use automated methods to identify orders eligible for review and to apply the appropriate adjustments to the orders.

In 1997, OCSE funded a research and demonstration grant to the State of Alaska Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED) to develop and test a more efficient method of reviewing and adjusting child support award amounts. The project, "Alaska: Review and Adjustment of Child Support Order Amounts: Evaluation of Electronic Modification (ELMO)," used income information from automated sources, such as the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH), linked electronically to its child support system to review child support orders annually. Promising results from this project include an increased number of reviews, more timely reviews, and modifications which more accurately reflect the noncustodial parents' ability to pay.

Under this solicitation, OCSE is looking for additional demonstration projects which States can conduct under current State law. These projects would demonstrate the feasibility of automating the review and adjustment process, using a variety of data sources including FPLS/New Hire earnings data, to better reflect current noncustodial/custodial parent income and assets (*i.e.*, at the time when noncustodial/custodial parent gets a raise or has increased assets and, alternatively, when noncustodial/custodial parent loses a job, has reduced salary, has an excessive default order, *etc.*) Projects would assess outcomes or effects such as the increase in both upward and downward adjustments; payment frequency by noncustodial parent; reduction in arrearage growth created by default orders; systems enhancements and other resources needed; guideline changes; and overall cost-effectiveness of automated review and adjustment.

**Funding:** A total \$200,000 is anticipated to be available for projects in this priority area and OCSE anticipates funding two grants of approximately \$100,000 each.

**Budget Period:** For Priority Area 3, the budget period will be up to 17 months.

**Priority Area 4: Expanding Customer Service Through Agency-Initiated Contact**

Under this solicitation, OCSE is looking for child support agencies to initiate customer contact to alert customers of upcoming appointments or missed appointments, and potential problems, such as missed payments, in order to improve customer satisfaction or resolve issues before they become problematic. Generally, State/local child support agencies use a responsive approach to customers; *i.e.*, using call centers, Web sites, or individual staff to respond to customer inquiries. The Australian child support enforcement system uses an agency-initiated customer service approach in which caseworkers notify clients, rather than waiting for clients to contact the agency, regarding payments and other case matters. This approach has been successful in Australia.

We are looking for child support agency approaches designed to alert customers to important case activities such as scheduled appointments or hearings, payment changes/delays, and to obtain case information. These projects would demonstrate the effectiveness of initiating contact to notify customers of important case activities or the need for information to complete case actions in order to improve child support outcomes such as increased collections, cost-effectiveness, customer service satisfaction, reduction in arrears, missed appointments, *etc.* Agency-initiated customer contact strategies could include automated notification systems and/or personal staff customer contact. A concern of many child support agencies in initiating client contact is the difficulty in reaching noncustodial and custodial parents by phone, since some do not have stable addresses or phone access. These projects would help determine the feasibility of an agency-initiated approach. Also, we prefer projects that compare different strategies (*automation vs. personal contact*) to ascertain which is more feasible and cost-effective; and/or projects that could assess the pros and cons of using agency-initiated approaches in different localities such as urban vs. rural localities, or large vs. small offices.

**Funding:** A total \$200,000 is anticipated to be available for projects in this priority area and OCSE anticipates funding two grants of approximately \$100,000 each.

**Budget Period:** For Priority Area 4, the budget period will be up to 17 months.