



FOR **Immediate** RELEASE
July 26, 2018

U.S. AbilityOne Commission Designates American Foundation for the Blind as a New AbilityOne Authorized Central Nonprofit Agency

Arlington, VA -- The U.S. AbilityOne Commission (Commission) has designated the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) as an AbilityOne authorized Central Nonprofit Agency (CNA), effective July 26, 2018.

The Commission unanimously approved the signing of a Cooperative Agreement with AFB, designating AFB as a CNA, with focus areas including knowledge-based jobs for people who are blind. The Cooperative Agreement will be posted today on the Commission's website at www.abilityone.gov.

The Cooperative Agreement outlines the terms and conditions of AFB's designation as a CNA and provides a framework for a new CNA model focusing on increasing job placement and career-advancement opportunities in knowledge-based positions.

"We look forward to working with AFB," said Commission Chairperson Thomas D. Robinson. "AFB's unique experience and demonstrated expertise in addressing the needs of people who are blind or have visual impairments will help further AbilityOne Program efforts to increase the number of career opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities."

National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and SourceAmerica remain AbilityOne Program CNAs. AFB's first 18 months as a CNA will be limited to research and studies, and have no impact on existing AbilityOne jobs and contracts.

"The Commission will continue to rely on the assistance of NIB and SourceAmerica in facilitating the AbilityOne Program in accordance with the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act," Robinson said.

AFB joins NIB, established in 1938, and SourceAmerica, established in 1974, as an AbilityOne CNA. Founded in 1921, AFB was the workplace of Helen Keller, world-renowned writer and advocate for people who are blind. AFB has a long history of strategic leadership

in the vision loss field, including public policy advocacy, audiobooks, publishing web and print content, and removing technological and systemic barriers that deny access for people with vision loss. AFB also played an integral role in the passage of legislation important to the blind community, including the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act.

The decision to designate AFB as a CNA is based on the Commission's longstanding goal of creating more jobs, more innovation and more competition within the AbilityOne Program. The Commission's mission is to provide employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities in the manufacture and delivery of products and services to the federal government.

The Commission designated AFB as a CNA in accordance with the Commission's statutory authority under 41 U.S.C. Chapter 85 to "designate a central nonprofit agency or agencies to facilitate the distribution...of orders of the Federal Government for products and services on the procurement list among qualified nonprofit agencies for the blind or qualified nonprofit agencies for other severely disabled."

The Commission's use of the phrase "knowledge-based jobs" refers to "knowledge work," a management-theory phrase often used to describe work that involves certain kinds of expertise, education or experience. Examples include information technology, finance and government contracting.

Three-Phase Cooperative Agreement

The Cooperative Agreement, which outlines the terms and conditions of AFB's designation as a CNA, will be executed in three phases over a total of five years, with specific requirements and deliverables for each phase.

Phase I: Research and Studies (18 months) – AFB will conduct research and studies to meet a series of objectives including:

- Identify innovative employment opportunities/careers and lines of business for people who are blind.
- Identify a model for continuous identification of employment opportunities, careers and lines of business.
- Identify multiple ways to identify blind veterans seeking employment, identify the type of employment they desire, and provide them with employment.
- Identify means or methods that the Commission, a CNA and/or a nonprofit agency (NPA) may consider to increase and foster innovation in the AbilityOne Program.

During this research and studies phase, AFB will be exempt from regulatory requirements of a CNA in the AbilityOne Program and will not be authorized to collect Program Fees from nonprofit agencies in the AbilityOne Program.

Phase II: CNA Capability Development (30 months) – During Phase II, AFB will begin to implement recommendations and findings from Phase I research and studies and, pending Commission approval, begin to execute CNA regulatory requirements.

Phase III: Transition to Full CNA Functionality (12 months) – Phase III is the period during which AFB will transition to full functionality as a CNA. During this phase, AFB will provide management, labor, supervision, materials, equipment and supplies to furnish CNA program services as outlined in the Cooperative Agreement. These program services include the capability to serve as a CNA for nonprofit agencies.

About the AbilityOne Program

The AbilityOne Program is one of the largest sources of employment in the United States for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. Approximately 45,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities, including approximately 3,000 veterans, are employed at approximately 550 nonprofit agencies nationwide, across 15 time zones, from Maine to Guam. AbilityOne provided more than \$3.3 billion in products and services to the federal government in fiscal year 2017. The Program operates at more than 1,000 locations, representing 40 government agencies, including more than 150 Base Supply Centers at military and government installations.

About the U.S. AbilityOne Commission

The AbilityOne Program is administered by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, the operating name of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled. The Commission is an independent federal agency. The Commission is comprised of 15 Presidential appointees: 11 represent federal agencies and four serve as private citizens who are knowledgeable about employment barriers facing people who are blind or have significant disabilities. The Commission designates central nonprofit agencies to facilitate the employment of people who are blind or have significant disabilities. CNA Cooperative Agreements with the Commission include performance work statements, quality assurance surveillance plan deliverables, and agreement clauses. The Commission currently executes the AbilityOne Program based on agreements with three central nonprofit agencies: National Industries for the Blind, SourceAmerica and the American Foundation for the Blind. Commission-designated CNAs are private entities.

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