
**Accelerating the Academic Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities
Research Initiative
U.S. Department of Education
Institute of Education Sciences**

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**Transcript
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Slide 1

Good afternoon. My name is Kristen Lauer. I am a project officer at the National Center for Special Education Research and the contact for the Accelerating the Academic Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities Research Initiative or A3 as we're calling it. I am joined today by NCSER's Commissioner Dr. Deborah Speece and Amanda Hoffman. We'd like to welcome you to this webinar on our new A3 Initiative. Please feel free to use your question and answer buttons as we move through this webinar today. We will try to stop along the way to answer your questions. If we don't have enough time to get to your questions, you can always email me after the webinar at Kristen.Lauer@ed.gov.

Slide 2

Let's get started. In the next hour and a half, we are going to talk about the purpose and need for the A3 initiative, review some of the A3 basics like project requirements, funding limits, application due dates, go into the application requirements and information that should be included in your research narrative, discuss the peer review process, and provide some final reminders and tips for your application.

Slide 3

Now I am going to discuss the purpose and need for this initiative.

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A3 applicants and grantees are expected to accomplish these two guiding aims. The first aim encompasses a majority of the work to be done through an A3 Center. An A3 Center must develop and evaluate interventions to accelerate the reading and math achievement of students with or at risk for reading and math disabilities in grades 3 through 8. It's important to note that the Institute defines interventions broadly so that, as some examples, applicants can propose to develop instructional approaches, short term interventions that last a small number of weeks, semester or year-long interventions, and interventions that are delivered via technology.

For the second aim, A3 grantees are also expected to collaborate with other A3 grantees to create a tightly linked network of researchers across a variety of disciplines who will work collaboratively. I will describe both of these guiding aims in more detail later in the webinar.

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So why is this initiative needed. Over the last 10 or 15 years, schools have begun implementing response to intervention approaches that provide increasingly intensive instruction or intervention based on student academic or behavior skills and needs. Researchers have demonstrated that the proportion of students determined to be at high risk for disability or school failure decreases with more intensive interventions and that students who receive more intensive instruction, as a whole, show significant improvements compared to students who received instruction typically provided by their schools. However, despite being provided increasingly intensive interventions, a number of students continue to show limited or no progress. Often the students who fail to respond to intensive interventions have IEPs or learning disabilities, and some may have co-occurring disabilities in mathematics and reading or other co-occurring conditions or characteristics. Tertiary, and in some cases secondary, interventions as currently conceptualized and implemented are clearly inadequate for meeting the academic needs of these students who have the most intractable learning problems. For example, there is growing evidence that the ways researchers and schools have often attempted to increase the instructional intensity incrementally through varying setting, size of the instructional group, frequency of intervention, session length, program duration, instructional strategies, and content may not be adequate for meeting these students' needs.

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This initiative will focus on developing a science of intensive instruction for students who have disabilities in reading, mathematics, or both, or are at high risk for being so identified. This need is more urgent for students in late elementary school and higher. By late elementary school,

academic deficits and achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their peers have become well established, and the likelihood of accurately identifying students who need more intensive interventions is improved.

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So now I'm going to review the basics of the A3 initiative

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The Institute anticipates funding a maximum of 3 A3 Centers.

The maximum duration for each A3 Center is 5 years.

The maximum award for each 5-year Center is \$10,000,000. This includes direct and indirect costs.

Centers will be cooperative agreements. This means that you should expect NCSER to be very involved in your project. This may include NCSER's approval of your research activities as well as meeting frequently, often monthly or biweekly, via conference call or in person in Washington, DC.

Applications are due September 20, 2012.

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The application narrative can be no longer than 35 single-spaced pages. The application narrative includes the following sections.

- Significance
- Research Plan
- Personnel
- Management Plan
- Resources

The Institute will remove any pages after the thirty-fifth page of the narrative, if we determine that you exceeded the page limit.

The 35 page single-space narrative does not include:

Abstract, Appendices, References, resumes or CVs, budget information, certificates and assurances

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Again, each A3 Center will be expected to accomplish or participate in these two guiding aims. The first being the focused program of research that involves developing and evaluating interventions to accelerate the reading and math achievement of students with or at risk for reading and math disabilities in grades 3 through 8. We anticipate that this work will be approximately 90% of your total budget.

The remaining 10% of your budget will be spent on collaborating with other A3 grantees to create a tightly linked network of researchers and other administrative activities.

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For the focused program of research, each A3 Center must focus on developing and rigorously evaluating interventions to improve **reading and mathematics** outcomes. The development of interventions to improve reading and math outcomes can be accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, you may wish to develop and evaluate the impacts of interventions that address reading and mathematics separately. As an alternative, you may wish to develop and evaluate integrated interventions that combine both reading and mathematics instruction. Either approach is fine in terms of meeting the RFA requirements.

Each A3 Center must focus on students with learning disabilities or at risk for learning disabilities with the most intractable learning problems. I will discuss later in this webinar some approaches for defining your sample of students.

Finally each A3 Center must address the academic achievement for a specific grade range that covers at least 3 years in a 3rd-8th-grade span. Reading and math must cover the same grade span. As an example, if you are interested in developing and evaluating an intervention targeting mathematics outcomes for students in 5th-7th grades, you must also develop and evaluate an intervention targeting reading outcomes for students in 5th-7th grades. The Institute anticipates that there may be some overlap across A3 Centers with respect to grades covered and that more than one applicant may propose to study the same grade span. However, the Institute **will not fund** more than two applications that cover the exact same grade range. Funding at each grade span will depend on the receipt of meritorious applications and the availability of funds.

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Each Center will also be expected to participate in the A3 R&D Network. This Network will include two members from each A3 Center as well as Institute staff. Network members will be expected to collaborate and cooperate with other members of the Network. This collaboration will include: using a common set of measures; sharing findings, study instruments, data; and meeting 2-3 times a year with each other and the Institute.

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Applicants who are eligible to apply for an A3 Center must demonstrate the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, non-profit and for-profit organizations and public and private agencies and institutions.

I am going to pause here and see if there are any questions.

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Okay, I'm now going to review the application requirements for an A3 Center.

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You should include the following five sections in your application research narrative:

Significance

Research Plan

Personnel

Management Plan

Resources

I will discuss these sections in more detail.

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In general, a minimum of two sets of studies should be described in your project narrative. The first should describe the development of a set of interventions or intervention that addresses reading and mathematics achievement. The second should describe the evaluation of the efficacy of the interventions that you developed.

A timeline of activities is recommended to help the reviewers understand your research plan across the five years.

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Looking at the research narrative in more depth. Your first section should be your significance section. This section should describe your research aims and provide a compelling rationale for your particular intervention or interventions. We have already laid out the need for this research initiative in general; now it's up to you to make the case for your particular approach to addressing this need. You will want to convince the reviewers that your study and proposed interventions are important. You will want to also describe current typical practice and why current practice is not satisfactory. You should also describe your proposed interventions, key intervention components, and how the interventions are to be implemented. Some of this could be done through your descriptions of your initial theories of change for your proposed intervention. The theory of change should detail the process through which key intervention

components are expected to lead to the desired reading and mathematics outcomes. Strong theories of change will describe how the key intervention components are related to outcomes that are aligned to the intervention as well as how your key components may promote transfer or generalization to more global reading and mathematics outcomes or to other education delivery settings. Your theory of change description should also include the theoretical justifications and any empirical evidence supporting the theory of change.

It may be the case that you are proposing to refine or modify an existing intervention that is not based on a theory of change. If this is the case, we ask that you articulate a general theory of change for the proposed intervention in which you describe what the intervention is expected to change that will ultimately result in improved student outcomes.

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The description of your research plan should describe two types of studies. The first type involves the development or refinement of reading and math interventions. The second involves evaluating the interventions to determine their efficacy for improving reading and math outcomes.

Now, I am going to discuss the requirements for the development of the interventions. Three aspects of intervention development should be described: First is the description of the development process. For this section you would want to describe the method for developing or modifying the intervention to the point where educators can implement the intervention. The second section should describe your methods for determining whether end users are able to implement the intervention in schools. The final section should describe your research design and method for determining the promise of the intervention or interventions for improving math and reading outcomes.

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For both the development work and the evaluation work, you will want to clearly describe or define your research sample.

Again the focus of this sample is on students with learning disabilities or at risk for learning disabilities with the most intractable learning problems. The Institute recognizes that there are a variety of ways to define the sample. For example you can propose to use criteria based on pre-intervention screening measures or criteria based on slope discrepancy.

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However, the Institute does not want you to use protracted identification methods to define your sample.

Applicants can use persistent nonresponse as a criterion but have options in choosing to define “nonresponse” in a way that is valid or makes sense for their project.

I encourage you to contact me directly if you have any specific questions about your sampling plan and how it relates to your project. My email address is provided at the end of the presentation .

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When defining your sample, you should pay careful consideration to and clearly describe any:

Coexisting characteristics such as being an English learner

Coexisting conditions or disabilities such as emotional disturbance or ADHD

Setting, which includes school demographic information as well as information about class or small group instruction

And it's important to describe the interventions that you propose to develop and test and how they are appropriate for your sample and setting.

Slide 22

Moving on to the development of the interventions. Again, it's important to describe what will be developed. The reviewers should have a clear understanding of what you are proposing to develop and what might already exist. They should also understand your procedures for developing the intervention including a timeline of development as well as steps you will take to enhance the likelihood that educators will find the interventions usable and feasible.

There are a couple of types of evidence that you should collect during your development process. The first type is evidence that the interventions can be implemented in schools. This should include describing the data you will collect to show feasibility and implementation of the intervention as well as the procedures you will use to collect your feasibility data.

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Your description of the development process should include the process or steps you will take to refine your interventions or components of them based on observing their functioning and collecting data on their feasibility, usability, and promise.

The second type of evidence that is important to your development work is your evidence of promise. You must provide a detailed plan for a pilot study or series of pilot studies to demonstrate the promise of the interventions for improving math and reading outcomes. Your development plan should detail the proposed research design, data to be collected, analyses to be used, and how you will conclude that your interventions show promise. The Institute

recognizes a continuum of rigor in defining promise of an intervention. Randomized controlled trials or RCTs, even if underpowered, or single case experimental designs to determine promise may be more acceptable to reviewers than quasi-experimental designs for showing the promise of your interventions.

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One thing in particular that we wanted to point out is the idea of transfer. The Institute is interested in interventions that are designed to promote transfer of skills to broader domains and settings. In other words, the Institute encourages applicants to think about how instruction in discrete skills that underlie overall reading ability ---for example vocabulary knowledge or comprehension strategies---may transfer to improvements in general reading ability or performance in other content areas as well as students' ability to transfer the skills that they've learned to the classroom and, in some cases, home.

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The second part of your research plan is the description of your studies to evaluate the efficacy of your intervention or interventions for improving reading and math outcomes.

Your evaluation studies should meet the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards (with or without reservations). The link to these standards is provided on the slide.

For this evaluation work, the Institute prefers randomized controlled trials. For the A3 Initiative, we are not allowing single case experimental designs to evaluate the efficacy of the developed interventions. You can propose to use single case experimental designs, however, to complement your RCTs.

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You should provide detailed description of your research design and methods and demonstrate that they meet WWC standards (with or without reservations).

You should provide a detailed power analysis that addresses the clustering of participants, the minimum effect of the intervention you will be able to detect, a justification as to why this level of effect would be expected from the intervention, and why this would be a practically important effect. The Request for Applications includes other guidance related to power analysis, and I encourage you to review that guidance on page 11.

You should also clearly describe key measures. I'm going to discuss measures in a few slides.

Key moderators and mediators should be described as well as your data analysis plan. Your description of your data analysis procedures should make clear how the analysis plan directly

answers your research questions and will evaluate the impact of the interventions and any subgroup impacts, if appropriate. It should also describe any roles of moderators and mediators, and how analysis of fidelity of implementation will be conducted. Your procedures should take into account any clustering of students in groups, classes or schools and how missing data or attrition will be handled.

Slide 27

When describing how your students, classrooms or schools will be randomized, you should provide a compelling rationale for the unit of randomization. For example, you could provide a strong rationale for why individual students, groups of students or classrooms, teachers, or schools would provide the appropriate unit of randomization given the characteristics of your intervention, setting, students, and available resources. You will also want to explain procedures for assignment of groups and how integrity of the assignment process will be ensured. For example, will you use a random number generator or some other method to assign groups to treatment and will there be an independent evaluator, in other words someone who didn't design the intervention, who will assign units to experimental or control conditions?

Slide 28

You should have a series of measures as part of your evaluation procedures. These measures should be linked to your proposed theory of change. You should give careful consideration to your reading outcome measures. You may wish to include researcher-developed measures that are aligned with the experiences of the treatment group, such as mastery monitoring or curriculum based assessment measures.

Strong applications will also include reading and math measures that are not strictly aligned with the intervention and may be considered fair to the control group. These measures would be considered to be more distal to the intervention and could include standardized or norm referenced reading and math measures.

Again, we encouraged applicants to design interventions to investigate and promote transfer of learned skills to broader domains and settings, and your measurement system could include outcomes that demonstrate that transfer has occurred. You should also document teachers' adherence to the intervention or fidelity of implementation as well as collect data on what the experiences of the control group are. Students in the control group will be receiving math and reading instruction and potentially interventions that are typically provided by their schools. It will be important to document the services that they received as part of their normal school day.

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You may also propose to conduct supplemental exploratory work that investigates malleable factors that are associated with student outcomes or conditions that may mediate or moderate the relations between malleable factors and education outcomes. This work should be conducted in addition to the development and evaluation work.

I am going to stop here to see if there are any questions.

Slide 30

In terms of personnel expertise at an A3 Center, we are anticipating that each A3 Center will leverage expertise across a breadth of disciplines such as special education, developmental psychology, cognitive science, and research methodology. Each team is expected to demonstrate expertise in developing reading and math interventions, expertise in rigorously evaluating the impact of interventions, and experience working with education delivery settings or schools.

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For each key person, you should clearly indicate individuals' qualifications, roles and responsibilities on the current project, and percent time devoted to this project. The description should make clear that the team has the appropriate training, time on the project, and experience to implement the proposed research as well as a history of successful collaborations.

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Your research narrative should describe plans for overall management of the project and team as well as any coordination of work occurring across the subteams within the Center. It is important that you acknowledge your willingness to participate in the A3 network and provide evidence that you have participated in collaborative efforts like the A3 Network and Leadership team.

You should also describe procedures for coordinating with schools and describe how the objectivity of your research, particularly the evaluation of the interventions will be maintained if intervention developers or distributors are involved.

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The final section of your research narrative is the resources section. This section should detail your access to institutional resources across all of your key sites and access to schools. Access to schools can be demonstrated through letters of participation and support from these schools.

Again I'm going to pause here to see if there are any questions.

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I want to spend some time talking about the peer review process for the A3 Initiative.

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Applications will be reviewed for compliance and responsiveness to the RFA. Those applications that are compliant and responsive to the RFA will be assigned to a review panel. At least three panel members will conduct a primary review of each application. At panel meeting, the most competitive applications are reviewed and discussed by full panel.

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The reviewers will review your application according to the following five criteria:

- Significance
- Research Plan
- Personnel
- Management Plan
- Resources

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For significance, reviewers will be asked to evaluate whether you provided a compelling rationale for the significance of the project as defined in the sections on the Significance of the Focused Program of Research. Again, you will want to clearly describe your research aims and provide a compelling rationale for --and a clear description of--- your interventions and their specific components. You will also want to make clear why your interventions are expected to produce better student outcomes than current education practices.

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For research plan, reviewers will evaluate whether you met the RFA's requirements described in the Methodological Requirements for the Focused Program of Research section. This includes the requirements for the development of the interventions as well as the evaluation of their efficacy. If you propose any supplemental studies, these studies will be evaluated as well.

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For personnel, reviewers will determine whether the Principal Investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess appropriate training and experience and will commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed research. They will also determine whether your team has a history of successful collaborations and that you have partnerships in schools or districts to support the development and implementation of the interventions. You will want to make sure that the key personnel expertise matches all aspects of your proposal.

Slide 40

For management plan, the reviewers will evaluate the plans and procedures for the overall management of the project and determine whether the team has the capacity to efficiently and successfully complete the proposed research. They will also evaluate whether you will be able to coordinate with other members of the A3 Network.

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For resources, the reviewers will evaluate whether you and your partner organizations have the facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources required to support the proposed activities. They will also evaluate whether the commitments of each partner show support for the implementation and potential success of the project.

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After applications are reviewed, all applicants receive email notification of the status of their application. Applicants will also receive copies of reviewer comments via email.

I want to point out that the review and award process takes approximately eight months from application due date to notification date. Applicants will be notified about funding decisions via email no later than July 1, 2013. So if you submit an application and don't hear anything by July 1st 201, please contact me.

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Okay we are going to finish up with some final reminders.

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There are three important documents to download when completing an application. The first is the Request for Applications which can be found on the IES website.

The second is the Application Submission Guide. The guide covers the application submission process, package documents, and steps for uploading your application. It too will be available on the IES website. It will be posted on July 19.

The final important site is grants.gov. You will find the application package on that site. Grants.gov cannot be accessed from the IES website. The application package will be available on Grants.gov on 7/19/12.

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This page shows the IES website and where to find the Request for Applications. You will click on the funding opportunities tab and then the funding opportunities subtab.

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That will take you to the funding opportunities webpage. If you scroll down about halfway you will find the A3 Request for Applications.

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We encourage applicants to submit letters of intent. The letter of intent is not binding and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application. Letters of intent are to be submitted to the website iesreview.ed.gov. We ask that you submit your letter of intent by 4:30 p.m. Washington DC time on July 19, 2012.

The Institute uses the information in the letters of intent to identify the expertise needed for the scientific peer review panels, secure a sufficient number of reviewers to handle the anticipated number of applications, and provide feedback to you on your research idea. Receipt of the letter of intent will be acknowledged by IES staff. Should you miss the deadline for submitting a letter of intent, you still may submit an application. The Institute asks that you inform us of your intention to submit an application if you miss the deadline.

The letter of intent should include a title, brief description of the proposed focused program of research, name, institutional affiliation, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the Principal Investigator and any co-Principal Investigators, key collaborators, and contractors, duration of the proposed project, and estimated total budget request.

The project description should be single-spaced and should not exceed one page (about 3,500 characters).

Again, we encourage all researchers to submit letters of intent by **July 19, 2012**.

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Applications are due on September 20, 2012.
We do NOT accept late applications.

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A final reminder of important dates for A3 applications.
Applications are due on Sept. 20, Application packages and the submission guides will be posted on July 19.

Your earliest anticipated start date is July 1, 2013. The latest start date you can ask for is September 1, 2013.

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Again the application package can be found on grants.gov.

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I want to encourage you to visit our Resources for Researchers website.

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The website includes information about the peer review process, resources for preparing a grant application, and previously held webinars.

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I also want to encourage you to participate in future webinars for the FY 2013 competitions, particularly the Application Submission Process.

Some final reminders

Please read the Request for Applications carefully.

I also want to encourage you to call or email me early in the process.

Finally, I can review draft proposals and provide feedback as time permits.

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And here are our website and my email address in case you want to contact me. And now I will take some questions.

Thank you for joining us.