Institute of Education Sciences **Research Funding Opportunities Webinar Series**

Basic Overview of Funding Opportunities

Webinar Transcript

May 28, 2013

U.S. Department of Education

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Slide 1

Good afternoon. My name is Karen Douglas. I am a Program Officer with the National Center for Education Research (NCER). I oversee the English Learner topic as well as the Reading for Understanding Initiative, and I am delighted to be here with you to talk about all the great opportunities for grants with us here at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). With me is Jacquelyn Buckley. Jackie is a Program Officer in the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER), and she primarily oversees the Social and Behavioral topic in that Center. In this webinar, we will be reviewing requests for applications (RFAs) that are available for projects for fiscal year (FY) 2014, for grants starting between July 1st and September 1st of 2014.

Slide 2

What is the mission of IES? There are three general topics that IES has been charged with studying under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002. The three bullets that you see here (on the slide) apply to all of IES, not just to the two Centers that we are representing today. First, we are charged with describing the condition and progress of education in the United States. Second, we are trying to find new education practices that actually can improve the academic achievement of students in the United States as well as their access to those educational opportunities. Finally, we want to evaluate the effectiveness of federal and other education programs.

As I pointed out, some of these goals are specifically ones that NCER and NCSER are charged with addressing, primarily the second two—identifying education practices and evaluating effectiveness. The first bullet is one that is addressed through other parts of the Institute, primarily in the National Center for Education Sciences.

Slide 3

I just intimated that there are a number of divisions within IES. First is the Office of the Director. As you probably know, our current Director is John Q. Easton. There are four centers under the Director; the NCER and NCSER are the two that are highlighted for our discussion today. In addition, there is the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which generates the basic data that you see on the IES website and that provide a rich description of what is happening in U.S. schools. The fourth is the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), which oversees the regional educational laboratories (RELs). They are primarily engaged in work related to the evaluation of education interventions.

Off to one side of the Director is the National Board for Education Sciences, which advises the Director on policy and other aspects of IES. This is a presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed group. To the left, you will see the Standards & Review Office, which, notably, is separate from each of the other Centers underneath. They provide an independent review function. All of the reviews of the applications take place in that office, which is separate from the Centers for which Jackie and I work.

Slide 4

Let us look specifically at the mission for the research centers. As it states on the slide, NCER supports rigorous research that addresses our most pressing education problems. You will notice that the age frame for this is from early childhood all the way through adult education. NCSER has very similar topics that they address, and that is why we are doing this webinar together today. If you have had a chance to look at the prior RFA for NCSER, CFDA 84.324A and then the NCER RFA, CFDA 84.305A, you will notice a lot of similarities in terms of the topics that are addressed and the general structure of the work. However, there is an important difference.

NCSER is charged with studying the development and education of infants, toddlers, and students who are at-risk for disabilities—although only through high school, not all the way through postsecondary education.

Slide 5

What are the research objectives that guide the work of NCER and NCSER? First of all, we want to develop and identify new interventions that can enhance academic achievements and can be used widely; the emphasis here is on "used." We have historically had success in developing new interventions that could potentially have an impact on student learning, but they haven't been feasible for use in schools or necessarily have been designed in ways that make sense to policymakers and practitioners. I think you will notice, as we go through the presentation today, that IES is putting more and more emphasis on developing interventions that actually will be useful to teachers and students in classrooms and that can be understood and used by a wide range of stakeholders.

We also want to identify, importantly, what does not work, so that we can find better ways to address learning problems than perhaps we have in the past. We also want to understand the processes that underlie the design and functioning of better educational interventions, and how they vary in their effectiveness in different contexts—that could mean for different subgroups of students or different locales and schools that are organized in different ways.

Slide 6

Let us look at a current overview of what we have already funded at NCER.

Slide 7

Here (on the slide) you see a list of all the programs that we have funded in the past and the number of awards and investment in dollars in the right-hand column. The first program, the Education Research Programs, is our largest RFA. As is indicated here, we have funded almost $900 million worth of research under the Education Research Programs, and that is the one that we are going to be talking most extensively about today because, as you can see, that is probably the program in which a lot of you are interested. However, we fund a lot of other programs.

Second, under "Research Programs" is what is called "Education Research and Development Centers." We have funded 20 of these centers, and they usually address specific topics. For example, in NCER we funded a research center called the "CREATE Center," whose mission was to develop and test new interventions in adolescent reading for students who were English learners. You can find links to all of these centers on our website, and I hope you will take the time to look at them and see the focus of these centers.

Next, you will see we fund a lot of training, both with postdoctoral and predoctoral students. The Evaluation of State & Local Programs & Policies is just as the name implies. It is specifically designed to evaluate existing programs that are being implemented widely. Then, we fund work in the development of new statistical and research approaches. Reading for Understanding is a large, one-time initiative that we funded in 2010. The initiative is taking a comprehensive approach to studying the foundations of deep reading comprehension all the way from prekindergarten through grade 12, and developing new interventions and assessments to improve reading for understanding.

The Unsolicited topic that you see at the bottom is an open call that we have funded in the past. I will say that we haven't funded many of these lately. For an unsolicited proposal, you have to be able to demonstrate that the topic cannot fit under any of our other RFAs. Last, but certainly not least, we also fund the development, through the Small Business Innovation Research Program, of new learning tools, both within NCSER and NCER.

Slide 8

Here is a slide that summarizes the investments for NCSER. Again, the first program that you see there, the Special Education Research, is analogous to the Education Research program that you saw at the top of the other slide, and that is where the majority of their work has been funded. If you looked on the slide you will notice that they also fund research and development (R&D) centers, postdoctoral research training, and small business innovation research.

Slide 9

That is what we have done in the past. Now, I am sure what you are really interested in is finding out what we are funding in the coming year. That is what brought you to this webinar today.

Slide 10

First, I have a message that Jackie Buckley is going to help with, since she is the representative from NCSER, and I am going to turn it over to her.

Hello everyone. As Karen mentioned, we typically have two main requests for applications each year, one out of NCER, where Karen works, and then one out of NCSER, where I work. Unfortunately, as many of you may already be aware, we are not holding a research or a research training competition for fiscal year 2014 due to limited funds. If we have funds in 2014, our intention is to fund awards that were rated highly from this year, the 2013 competition. We funded applications in 2013 as far down on our

funding slate as we could. If we have additional money in 2014, our intention is to continue to fund those applications that were rated very highly this year and would have been funded but were unable to receive funding from us this year.

We also anticipate getting back on schedule and holding a regular grant competition for fiscal year 2015, in which the RFA would be out in the spring of 2014. Unfortunately, this year we do not have any funding opportunities. So, the conversation today will be on the NCER competitions.

Slide 11

There are several programs in NCER that actually allow for the study of students with disabilities, and you will see them on the screen here. One is called "Partnerships & Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice and Policy" (84.305H). The program is focused on problems of practice. We are going to talk just briefly about this RFA near the end of the webinar today. The second one is in the Postsecondary & Adult Education topic, which is part of the Education Research program that we are going to spend more time thinking about today. These are two places that if you were interested in submitting an application about students with disabilities, which you would normally think about submitting to NCSER, you could actually perhaps submit under the NCER RFA.

This is a good time for me to tell you that there are three basic points that I am going to be repeating throughout this conversation today. First of all, when you get ready to think about submitting an application, the most important first step for you is to go to the funding opportunities (funding opps) page. Fortunately, many of you have probably already found that because you have been wise enough to sign up for a webinar, and that information is listed on the funding opps page. The next one is to carefully read the RFA for the competition in which you are interested.

Our RFAs have a lot of very detailed information and can provide you with the purpose of the particular grant program and some of the interesting questions you might want to address in your research. Very importantly, there is a lot of detail with which you have to be concerned: age ranges of students you are studying, and the potential outcome measures that would be acceptable under that topic. It is very important that you read the RFA carefully to make sure that you have that information.

The third point is also very important: after you do that (the above points), you should e-mail the Program Officer for the topic or topics that interest you. Program Officers can be one of your best resources for helping think through whether the idea that you have and the details for your proposal will, in fact, be a good fit for the RFA. All of us are very unhappy and sad when we are faced with the situation that a grantee has spent a lot of

time preparing an application, submitted it, and didn't meet the actual requirements of the RFA. If that is the case, then it will not be reviewed. So that is a situation that we all want to avoid as much as possible, and the best way to do that is to be in touch with the Program Officer or Program Officers for the topics that you think might be relevant so that we can help you think through your plans and make sure they are responsive to the RFA.

Slide 12

How do you identify the funding opportunities that are available to you? Well, as I just mentioned, hopefully you all have done this already, but you start with our website. The website was redesigned last year, and I think they really did a great job of incorporating all the information you need in a form that is very easy to access. You should have this bookmarked on your computer. You also should sign up for the IES Newsflash, because that is how you will get the most up-to-date information on any relevant changes or updates and basic information about our funding. When our new RFAs are posted, we always send out an IES Newsflash to alert the community. Funding opportunities also are announced in the Federal Register, so you can check that as well.

As I just mentioned, the next important thing is to look at all the RFAs that are listed on our website. Many of you are accustomed to looking at Education Research Programs, but we have some new RFAs that are very interesting and actually might be a good fit for your work as well. You will want to take a look at everything that is available. Then, importantly, as I said, contact the relevant Program Officer so that they can help to guide you through the details of your application.

Slide 13

Let us take a look at how you sign up for the IES Newsflash. Here is a look at our website, and you will see that there is a tab at the top that says, "News and Events."

Slide 14

You click on that, and it will take you to a page that looks like this (on the slide); it says "Newsflash" on the left. On the right you will see there are a number of choices. The first one is general IES News and Information. Underneath you can choose to receive a notification for each of the Centers individually. You would certainly want to check the ones for NCER and perhaps NCSER, depending on the focus of your work. If it were I, I would just check all of them, because there is a lot of interesting work happening in all of our Centers in which you may be interested.

Slide 15

Now, let's go back to the funding opps page. Here are a few more screenshots on our website (on the slide), if you haven't had a chance to navigate this yet. To go back you find a tab at the top that says, "Funding Opportunities," and click on that.

Slide 16

Now, you come to this great screen (on the slide). This is it in a nutshell. Here are all the steps that you need to go through, so that you have a good application.

First of all, you will want to identify a current funding opportunity. We are going to look at those in a minute. You will see here that it says that there is a letter of intent, and there also are application deadlines. The letter of intent is a pretty brief letter that you are asked to submit, letting our Standards & Review Office know that you are planning on submitting an application. It doesn't require pages and pages of explanation. It usually just provides an overview of the topic you want to study and a few paragraphs to describe the study. It is important for two reasons that you submit it. Although it is not required that you submit a letter of intent, it is really helpful to IES that you do so.

First of all, the Standards & Review Office uses the letter of intent information as they try to assemble the appropriate review panels so that they can, to the extent possible, have people on those panels with the expertise to review your application well. Secondly, Program Officers receive your letters of intent, and we review them to see if it looks like what you are proposing is responsive to the RFA. We can flag questions and be in touch with you, so that we can help you to reform your ideas or perhaps send you to an RFA that might be a better fit. It formally kicks off your contact with Program Officers once we receive those letters of intent. We e-mail our contact information to every person who submits one to let you know how to set up phones calls with us and review the whole application in detail.

Next, of course you have already done this, you would want to register for a funding opportunities webinar. Now, today's webinar, as we mentioned, is a very high-level overview of what we are funding. You probably already noticed that we have a lot of follow-up webinars that look at specific funding opportunities. Each of the new RFAs has a webinar that will lead you through that RFA. We also have one specifically for minority institutions to help them increase their ability to receive funding with us, so take a look at those.

Next you will want to review the RFA, the Application Submission Guide, and the application package. You may have already looked at the RFA. It is what outlines the topics that we fund, the goals that we fund, and the general call for the work. Many people forget to look at the Application Submission Guide; it also has some details in it

that will answer some of your questions about submitting an application. Then, finally, is the application package.

Many institutions actually handle the upload of your final application for you. If you are at a university, that is generally the case. You also will want to be in touch, if you haven't been already, with your sponsored grants office or the appropriate person to find out how the submission process works at your institution.

Next, you will want to submit a letter of intent, as I mentioned previously. Then, you will submit your application to Grants.gov. The application does not get submitted on our website. It must be submitted onGrants.gov, importantly, before the application deadline, and we are going to be talking more about that a little bit later. Now, you will notice there is also a link here to "Other IES Funding Opportunities." Across IES there are other calls for work—some requests for proposals that are released and some other grant opportunities that may be available. You probably would want to take a look at that link as well.

Slide 17

How will you identify an appropriate grant program? You will see on the website that there are a lot of programs listed, and you are probably wondering how you will figure out which of these would be the best fit for you. In case we haven't said it before, the first thing you need to do is read the RFA. Next, you will want to review all the announced topics and the methodological requirements that are detailed in those RFAs.

This is really important. It is helpful to take a look at the abstract for the projects that we have already funded. We have abstracts for just about every grant now up on our website that will give you an overview of the goal of the research, the activities that were proposed to be completed, and what kind of analyses people are doing. When applicants ask me how to get a sense of how their work would fit in with NCER and NCSER, I generally recommend that they take a look at these abstracts. It is also helpful to applicants, as you are trying to think about which topic your work might fit best under, if you take a look and see what has already been funded there.

One bit of advice though: as I am going to talk about later, the RFA does change every year. So, if you are looking at an abstract for a project that was funded several years ago, it may have proposed work that would not be acceptable under our current RFA. That is just one thing to keep in mind. I generally recommend that people primarily look at funding in the last few years, but still also be aware that something that was funded 2 years ago may not be fundable under the FY 2014 RFA.

Slide 18

Further down that funding opps page is a list of all the RFAs that are being competed this year. Let us go down and look at one. We will just pick the Education Research Programs because that is the one we are going to be talking a lot about today; if we click on that link, we would see a screen that looks like this.

Slide 19

This screen shows the topics that are competed under the Education Research Grant Programs. You will notice, again, that each of these is a link. Let's just click on one of these.

Slide 20

If we click on the "Cognition and Student Learning" link, it will take you to a short page that describes the general goals of the program, and it has a link to the appropriate RFA right there. Then, it has the name of the associated Program Officer and the telephone number and e-mail address. This will come in handy as you are trying to decide under which topic you might want to submit. Most Program Officers, I think, would say that it is most effective to reach out by e-mail first, rather than by phone, because we can usually respond more quickly to e-mails. If, for some reason, a phone call works best for you, you should certainly do that.

Slide 21

Here is another look at the topics that were shown on the previous page under Education Research Grants RFA. You might notice, in looking at these topics, that some of them are organized by age; for example, Early Learning Programs and Policies studies children in prekindergarten. Postsecondary and Adult Education studies students after they have left the K-12 system. The rest of these generally deal with children who are in K-12. So some of the topics are organized by age and some are organized by the focus of the work. For example, we have Education Technology, which, as the name would imply, is a program that is focused on creating and evaluating the use of educational technology. English Learners is another one that is topic-focused, specifically on the subgroup of students who are identified as non-native English speakers. One thing that is important to keep in mind is that your application might fit naturally under several of these topics, and so one of the primary activities in which applicants need to engage is to figure out which topic is the best fit for their application.

Slide 22

Something new this year is that we have organized grants that are engaged primarily in developing and providing professional development to K-12 teachers under the Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching topic. You will see here (on the slide) that for all the topics in red, if you are proposing an application for which the primary focus is professional development of K-12 teachers, you will need to submit that application under Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching, even if it is related to another topic. Say you are helping to provide professional development for teachers on how to offer better instruction to English learners, you would submit your application under Effective Teachers & Effective Teaching. The same is true for Mathematics & Science Education, Reading & Writing, Cognition & Student Learning, Education Technology, and Improving Education Systems: Policies, Organization, Management, and Leadership.

The exceptions to this rule are the programs that address students outside of K-12. Applications that deal with teacher professional development (PD) for early childhood educators would go directly to Early Learning Programs & Policies. The same is true with Postsecondary & Adult Education. Importantly, even within K-12 education, projects that are primarily focused on PD for K-12 teachers that address social and behavioral issues of students still would submit under the Social & Behavioral Context for Academic Learning topic.

The reason that this change occurred was that helping teachers to improve their knowledge and practice is the central focus of much of the work of improving classrooms, and it involves several theories of change. In addition to trying to help students to learn, we also are trying to help teachers learn. The primary focus of many of these grants is actually on teachers as learners. We feel that by bringing these grants together under Effective Teachers & Effective Teaching we can give better guidance to applicants on what those applications should look like, and it also will increase the focus of reviewers on the very important aspects of grants that are attempting to design and implement good PD of teachers.

However, it is important to remember that many of our grants actually involve some kind of PD for teachers. For example, if you are designing a new technology product for use by students in the classroom, it is very likely that it would have a component to assist teachers with administering the technology. It could be a training manual; it could be a 1-day workshop. The delineation is that the training of teachers is not the primary focus of that work. Some of you probably are scratching your heads about your project and saying, “I am not really sure if PD is the primary focus of my work,” which means that you should talk to Wai Chow, who is the Program Officer for the Effective Teachers & Effective Teaching program, and perhaps also the Program Officer for the other topics

that you think might be a good fit for your work. Then, they can help you decide where the best fit is for your work.

As I pointed out earlier, many of you can probably look at the list of topics in this RFA and have several possibilities for your work, and so we frequently set up joint phone calls among Program Officers. For example, if you are trying to design something about English learners that is also addressing reading and writing, and you are not sure which is the better topic, I could set up a phone call with the Reading & Writing Program Officer and we could talk about it at more length.

Slide 23

One thing that differs among some of the topics is the outcomes that are permissible. However, here is a general outcome list of the student outcomes that we are interested in across our grants. In the Prekindergarten level, the primary focus is on getting kids ready for school. You see here the student outcomes that are listed: prereading, language, early math, and social and behavioral competencies. The important thing to remember is that in all of our grants, regardless of the focus of the work, there has to be some relationship to student outcomes. Even if you are designing a study to increase the capacity of preschool teachers to help kids learn to read, in your application you will need to follow that through to what impact it actually has on student outcomes.

In Kindergarten through Grade 12, the focus here turns more to learning and achievement in the subjects of reading, writing, math, and science. It also includes how students are progressing through school—whether they are being retained in grade and whether they are able to keep up with their peers all the way to high school graduation. It includes outcomes related to social skills, attitudes, and behaviors that will support learning in school.

Slide 24

When we get to the postsecondary level, then the focus is primarily on access, persistence, and progress through the postsecondary system. We also have outcomes for students who are in developmental education programs. You know, when many students today get to college, they are not quite ready to take college-level coursework and have to take remedial classes before they actually can enroll in a college-level course. We have additional outcomes in some areas with regard to reading, writing, English language proficiency, and math for students who are in these developmental programs. In adult education, again, the focus is on student achievement in reading, writing, and math; and then also in their access to, and completion and progress through, their adult education programs.

Slide 25

Let us try and determine, for an application, where would be the best fit. What you see right away is that every application has to think about two aspects. First of all, to which research program should I apply? Those are the kinds of topics about which we have been talking—Reading & Writing, Math & Science, English Learners. Importantly, to which goal should the researcher apply?

In this case, we are going to hypothesize that I am a researcher and I have this idea to develop an online tutoring system to teach kids pre-algebra. Let's take a look at my choice of goals for the grant.

Slide 26

The first goal that I might think about is Exploration. The Exploration goal is meant to help with hypothesis generation and look at moderators and mediators of student performance. In other words, what could we change in instruction that actually would help students learn better?

The next goal is Development & Innovation. As the name implies, this is the goal under which you would submit, if you actually wanted to develop a new intervention, policy, or practice. The third goal is Efficacy & Replication, so in this type of grant you actually would be testing the impact of a program, intervention, or policy; or you could be trying to replicate efficacy research that someone else had done on this particular intervention or practice.

The fourth type of goal is Effectiveness. Once we have tested the efficacy of an intervention and replicated the findings and we feel that it is ready for further testing with less involvement by the researcher, you could apply under the Effectiveness goal. The fifth type of goal is the Measurement goal, this is one in which you actually are trying to develop new measures; collect evidence as to whether existing measures provide good measurements for different types of students from different backgrounds; or, perhaps, find better ways to implement existing measurements.

Slide 27

Let us look at the Exploration goal in more depth. As I said, this one is all about trying to identify malleable factors. What are malleable factors? We get that question a lot; by "malleable factors" we are referring to factors that are amenable to change by the education system, such as children's behavior and skills, practices in which teachers engage in the classroom, and components of educational programs. It could be school and district practices or other educational policies, but it has to be something that actually could be changed by a school or public education system.

Projects under the Exploration goal, as I mentioned, are used to generate hypotheses. These could be about potential causal relations between these malleable factors and educational outcomes. I say "potential," because in an Exploration goal you cannot do a real test of the impact of a program. That is something reserved for the Efficacy goal. Exploration goals also could be used to contribute to theories of change, so that as we go on to develop interventions and assessments we have a stronger theoretical basis for why we believe these interventions might work. They also could be used as a quasi-experimental look at an existing intervention at impact, but it would not be capable of providing the rigorous impact information that we require in our efficacy trials. As you see here, there are a number of different methodological approaches. You can analyze existing data. You can collect your own data. You can complete a meta-analysis.

Slide 28

The next type of goal that I mentioned is the Development & Innovation goal. Let's see what we are looking at in this type of a goal. We could be developing a new curriculum or instructional approach, program, or policy; or we could be trying to improve an existing educational intervention, something that is already being used out there, but that we think is due for improvement to have more impact. Importantly, the RFA specifies that you need to use an iterative process in your design. It is very important that in a development grant application you talk about not only how you are going to develop an intervention but how you are going to field test it and how you are going to use information that you gather in the field test to revise the intervention. Normally, this would go through several cycles of iteration until you had improved the intervention to the place where you thought it was ready for pilot testing.

You need to collect data on three factors and your application should very clearly talk about this too—how you are going to collect data on usability; feasibility; and, importantly, the fidelity of implementation in real settings. So, as I mentioned earlier, we have had some efforts in the past where we have successfully developed new interventions, but when we took them out into actual classrooms, teachers found that they were impossible to implement in the way that they would need to be implemented in order to get the kinds of effects that we got in our studies.

We want to find out, first of all, if this intervention is usable. If it is a technology-based project—say we have iPads and we are presenting information to children to help them learn to read—does it actually work? Can students actually use this iPad? Can teachers actually help them use this iPad? The next question is, is this feasible? Is it something that schools actually could use? Would they have access to the kinds of infrastructure that they would need in order to support the use of this product? Then, fidelity of implementation is about if they can implement this product, intervention, or policy in a way that actually will achieve the kinds of results that we want. Schools, as you know,

are very dynamic settings; they are quite variable, and teachers, policymakers, and others in school settings have a lot of things on their plates. So, we need to make sure that when we create new interventions we do it with sensitivity to the actual on-the-ground conditions in which they actually will be used.

At the end of a Development & Innovation goal project you are expected to collect pilot data on the student outcomes associated with your new intervention. This is only considered to be pilot data. It is not meant to be a full-scale efficacy trial. However, we are encouraging grantees to do the most rigorous pilot study that they can, so that when they finish their development grant they have the evidence they need—should they find that the intervention actually had positive effects—to go on and propose to do an efficacy trial with us. You will want to pay close attention in the RFA to all of the different types of designs that you can use for pilot studies. It is okay to use a randomized-control trial in a development goal, if you can do that with the resources you have. That is the difficulty.

Most of the resources in a Development & Innovation grant should be directed at the development and refinement of the intervention. However, depending on what the intervention is—for example, if it is a technology that students can use in classrooms—it may be possible to do student-level assignment within the resources that are available to you in a Development goal. If so, we would encourage you to design the study that would give you the best information on the possible impact. Again, be sure and look carefully at the RFA for the details around what constitutes a pilot study.

Slide 29

Now that you have developed a new intervention and you have a great pilot study that shows this could potentially help students learn, what could be the next possible step? Well, we would like to see grantees propose to do efficacy and replication work, so that we can have a rigorous evaluation of whether an intervention actually works. You see there are four “flavors” of Efficacy & Replication grants. The first one is to test out whether the fully-developed intervention works, and this could be under ideal conditions. It could be the case that the researcher is still very involved in the delivery of this intervention in an Efficacy and Replication goal. The second would be to gather follow-up data on the longer-term effects of an intervention that has already demonstrated efficacy.

Say that you or someone else has done research on this new technology product and they have good results after using it with students for a year; you might propose to do a follow-up study and see if students were still showing benefits from that intervention 2 years later. Now, the follow up could be either with students who were in the intervention or a follow-up study could be with personnel. For example, teachers who

have participated in a professional development grant could be followed into the next year to see if the effects of the professional development were sustained over a longer period of time. Again, you could do a replication of another research project and you could vary the setting in which the intervention was administered.

The fourth type of efficacy study involves a retrospective analysis of existing data that has already been collected.

Slide 30

In an Efficacy & Replication goal we might ask what is needed to implement this intervention under routine practice, and we certainly want to reduce, to the extent possible, any bias that is introduced into the study due to the involvement of the researcher. This could be done in a variety of ways. Sometimes people are able to blind their data, so that when it comes to analysis the analyst doesn't know which was collected in the treatment or control condition. That is not always possible, but we do recommend that researchers to the extent possible put firewalls in place to reduce the potential for bias in interpreting the results of the study.

We don't require mediator analyses in Efficacy & Replication goals because, frequently, our studies are not powered to give us answers to those questions. We do recommend that you include exploratory questions to find out for whom, when, and under what circumstances these interventions work best.

Slide 31

After the efficacy grant, the next goal that we support is called the Effectiveness goal. Some of you might have known this previously as what we called "Scale-Up." The name was changed to "Effectiveness" last year. This differs from an efficacy trial in that we are now looking to see whether this intervention can have impact when implemented under typical conditions and also when the evaluation is performed by someone who is not involved in the development or substantially in the delivery of the intervention. In order to submit an Effectiveness proposal there needs to be at least two rigorous efficacy studies for the intervention that would support the potential impact of the intervention on student outcomes.

Slide 32

Under an Effectiveness goal, we expect that researchers will implement the intervention under routine practice; will include evaluators who are independent of the development and/or distribution of the intervention; and also, as I mentioned, be able to describe previous evidence that suggests strong efficacy for the intervention. We do not expect, however, that there will be wide generalizability from this one study. The main ways that

an Effectiveness goal is differentiated from an Efficacy & Replication goal is that it is implemented under routine practice and that the evaluator cannot be someone who has been involved in the development of the intervention. Again, we don't require confirmatory mediator analyses, but we do encourage you to do an exploratory one. The cost of the implementation of the intervention is limited to 25 percent of the total budget.

Slide 33

The last goal of the five that we support is the Measurement goal. In this one, your task is to develop a new assessment, to refine an existing one, or to gather evidence about the validity of an assessment for use with a particular group of students. This could involve the study of differential item functioning analysis to make sure that the measurement is providing us with good evidence for all students who are taking the assessments. Validation studies should specify the purpose, context, and population for whom the validity evidence is intended.

Refinement of an assessment can include all kinds of things. It could be, for example, trying to move a paper assessment to a computer-based assessment and see whether that is feasible and whether it provides you with the same evidence about students. It could be investigating new ways to score student performance, and we have a lot of fancy psychometric models that we can use these days to scale and evaluate assessment, so that also could be the focus of a Measurement goal grant. It doesn't necessarily have to be the actual development of an assessment.

So, now let's circle back to the question I raised about my potential project to develop a new online tutor in algebra. If I have a strong theory of change on which to base the online tutor, I would probably propose a development grant. On the other hand, if there isn't yet an adequate theoretical model I may not be ready to develop the online tutor. I may want to propose an Exploration grant in which I study what aspects of algebra instruction are most important in improving student learning prior to developing the online tutor. As far as the topic goes, my grant could fit under either the Education Technology or Math/Science topic so I would want to contact the Program Officers for both topics for advice.

Slide 34

As I mentioned earlier, every year the RFA changes somewhat, and on page 11 of the current RFA there is a list of highlighted changes. It should not be taken as a comprehensive list of changes, but it does alert you to some of the bigger changes. Once again, the admonition is to carefully read the RFA and then be in touch with Program Officers with your questions.

One thing that I want to point out to you this year is a change across all the goals of the RFA—you are now expected in the research plan section of your application to describe your plans to disseminate what you learn in the grant. The content of what is appropriate to share varies by research goal, and there is guidance in the RFA to help you think this through.

Slide 35

I do want to encourage you to send your questions, and we will stop here for a moment to see if you have submitted any.

Slide 36

Here is a list of all the programs that we are competing this year. The first one, the Education Research Grants Program, is the one that I have just discussed.

Going on down the page, you will see that we also are funding several R&D centers. We are soliciting grants on statistical and research methodology. This is an RFA that we have competed in the past, but it has a new twist for this year. We are competing an RFA called 'Partnerships & Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice & Policy" which has three subtopics. Finally, we are competing a number of research training programs. You will note, however, that we are not competing postdoctoral training programs this year, as we have sometimes in the past.

Slide 37

There are two education R&D centers that we are competing this year. The first one is called the "National Center on Developmental Education Assessment & Instruction," and this is related to postsecondary students. Large numbers of postsecondary students, as I mentioned earlier, are finding that they have to take remedial courses when they get to college before they actually can start to accumulate college credits. Research suggests that the standardized tests many institutions are using to place students in these remedial courses may not always give good information and put the student in the best position in the college for their movement forward.

Furthermore, research has shown that longitudinal studies of students who are placed in developmental education frequently do not complete their courses, and that inhibits their ability to go on and earn a college degree. So, this R&D center is formulated to try to increase attention to a variety of new approaches in developmental education, both in assessment and instruction, and to conduct some pilots of some new ways of going about this. Let me stop for one question.

Question: *"For exploration projects, is it required to have a curriculum? Are teaching approaches fully developed before we start the project? Could you also specify the difference between Exploration and Development projects?"*

Answer: *"That is a great question. Let's start with Development projects. So, the purpose of a Development project is just that, it is to iteratively develop a new intervention, a policy or practice, that you believe has the potential to better meet a problem than what is already out there. Part of your job in writing a convincing application is to specify why your approach will be better than what is already happening. For Exploration projects, you cannot actually develop new interventions. Any development work should be taking place in the context of a Development project. For an Exploration project, you might be looking at an existing intervention and trying to relate it to some other data in a correlational fashion to see if there are aspects of that intervention that could lead you to new ideas about what is malleable or what actually might be more helpful to students in learning the proposed knowledge or skills. But the focus in an Exploration project is not the actual development of new interventions.*

Now, this is the point where I have to point you back to the Program Officer because it is possible that in some Exploration grants, some of which actually can involve small-scale experimental studies, that you do have to develop some materials in order to conduct those studies. What you want to do, though, is be sure that the development of those materials is construed as part of your experimental work and that it is not so extensive that it appears to be an actual development of an intervention. As you can see, in thinking about that, some of these lines get to be very close, and that is why it is important to think this through with a Program Officer.

It is good to think about the end-products, and that is true for all of our goals. What do you expect to have at the end of this grant? At the end of an Exploration grant, you expect to have new knowledge. You expect to have knowledge to inform theory. Perhaps you will have some knowledge to form the development of a new assessment, say, a conceptual framework. Say, for example, that you wanted to study some aspects of how teachers could better teach math in classrooms and you want to develop a new classroom observation system that would help you to measure how teachers provide instruction. However, there isn't a strong theoretical basis for understanding what aspects of teacher behavior actually have an impact on how students learn. You could propose an Exploratory project in which you could gather some classroom observations, relate that to measures of student learning, and use that to formulate a stronger theory of change that would then be useful for developing a new classroom observation tool, or perhaps it would be useful for developing a better intervention for teaching kids math. So, the results of Exploration projects could be used in a number of different ways.

At the end of a Development grant you need to have a fully developed intervention that has been iteratively developed and refined. You need to have a fidelity measure that you use in your pilot study, or perhaps in your development work, to specify how well this intervention is being utilized in the classroom. You need to have evidence of usability and feasibility, and then, finally, you need to have results from a pilot study in which you actually implemented the final version of the intervention—so you can see that the end results of Exploration and Development projects are very different.

At the end of an efficacy trial, you expect to have rigorous information on whether the intervention can work, perhaps not under routine conditions but under ideal conditions—whether the intervention has the potential to move student learning. At the end of an Effectiveness grant you would have information that an intervention could affect student learning when implemented without a researcher. So, hopefully that answers your question."

Back to the R&D center on developmental education, in this center the grantee will need to talk about a current developmental education assessment and the current practices that are being used at community colleges and other open-access institutions; your job will be to describe these practices. You will be convening stakeholders to inform your understanding of what is happening currently in community colleges and other institutions, and also to identify and test what are promising reforms to the systems that are currently in place.

The second R&D center is one on knowledge utilization, and here the task is to develop better tools for observing and measuring research use in schools. This is a very new topic for us, and I think it reflects the growing emphasis on making sure that the information, the interventions, and the tools that are coming out of our grants actually are used in schools. It is not always easy for researchers to do this. You know, many researchers don't have a lot of background in how to bridge their work into something that actually could be used by practitioners and stakeholders. The purpose of this center is to try to develop better tools and also strategies that researchers can use so that we can make sure that the work that we are doing actually ends up helping kids in school.

Slide 38

In the R&D center on developmental education, you will have two tasks. The first is to conduct research to document current practices, to look at promising programs, and to assess the effectiveness of the programs that are in place. Are they cost-effective? Are they easy to implement? Another set of activities is around leadership and outreach. In all of our R&D centers there is an expectation that the researcher actually is convening stakeholders, practitioners, and policymakers to share what they are learning in their

work, and also to have more direct assistance from states, colleges, and universities so that what we are learning actually can be brought to scale.

Slide 39

The center of knowledge utilization is about developing new tools and knowledge on how we better communicate the research in which we are engaged, and the interventions and strategies that we are creating so that they can have more of an impact on student learning. Also, again, there is this expectation for leadership and outreach activities so that there is a more effective way of engaging researchers and practitioners with the work that we are doing so that we can improve student outcomes.

Slide 40

The next area is our Statistical & Research Methodology in Education Grants program. The purpose of this program is to increase methodological knowledge—to create new statistical tools that will help us in the research that we are doing. We have a lot more resources than we used to have. We have a lot of great datasets that already contain a lot of variables and information, and we need better ways to analyze that data and make sure that it gets into the hands of end users in ways that are actually useful to them.

I have highlighted in green here (on the slide) the things that are new to some of these programs. We have had the Statistical & Research Methodology in Education Grants program for a number of years. This year the new component to that is that we have a focus on Early Career Statistical & Research Methodology Grants, which has the same goals as the other stats and methods program but is of shorter duration, and it is for researchers that are earlier in their career. The overall Statistical & Research Methodology in Education Grants program has a maximum award of a 3-year grant for $900,000. For the early career program, the maximum is 18 months and $200,000.

Slide 41

The next competition that was listed was Partnerships & Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice & Policy. As the name implies, the emphasis is on collaboration and partnership between a variety of educational stakeholders. This is a theme, which you will see in all of our RFAs with greater emphasis. As previously noted, the Education Research Grants program has a requirement to discuss dissemination to a wide audience. The goal of this program is, as the name implies, to find ways to build a closer collaboration of researcher, practitioners, policymakers, and education agencies. Part of the thinking for this is that in order to increase the usability and the impact of our work, we need to make sure that we are studying issues that are important to people who are working in schools and that we have better ways of communicating that research. So, it is a two-way street.

Slide 42

There are three foci under this particular RFA that are listed on the screen. The first one is the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research. This is to support a new or existing partnership, and this is really geared for just beginning the idea of a research partnership. It is meant to help the researcher and practitioner partnership actually develop a plan for future research that they could then submit to us for funding.

The second, the Continuous Improvement Research in Education, is a new one this year. It is meant to support well-established partnerships who are interested in finding better ways to improve their work together to come up with more usable solutions, more relevant research, and to revise existing approaches that are currently in practice.

The third one is a topic that we have had around for a while, but it has been reorganized under this RFA; it is the Evaluation of State & Local Education Programs & Policies. As the name implies, this is meant to support evaluation of existing programs that are happening under routine conditions in state and local agencies. I have a note here that this RFA had some slight modification on May 9th, so if you looked at the RFA before that, you want to make sure that you go back and get the May 9th version that is now posted on our website.

Slide 43

The last set of RFAs that I mentioned in the overall screen is our Research Training Programs; here, again, we have three topics under this RFA. The first one is the Predoctoral Interdisciplinary Research Training program. The goal of this program is to increase the supply of scientists and researchers who actually can do the rigorous education research that IES is trying to support and, importantly, make that research relevant to the field. It is an interdisciplinary program, so researchers could apply from institutions other than education colleges, but there needs to be a focus in the program on an education topic that is relevant to the United States. The idea here is that there are a lot of interesting and potentially useful ways of thinking about problems and knowledge in other domains, for example, in sociology and economics, from which education research would really benefit. That is what this program is meant to address.

This year there is a delineation between new and renewal programs. If you are submitting for a renewal program, you are asked to provide evidence as to the outcomes of your previous grant. How many predoctoral fellows did you actually train in your previous grant? What were their accomplishments? You will want to pay attention to that.

The next two are new in name only. They existed in other forms before, but they have been called different names. The Methods Training for Education Research is where grantees are asked to propose ways of training current education researchers. As I mentioned earlier, there are some really exciting new approaches being used in analysis and also in design. It is hard for researchers to stay current on these new developments. This is a program under which grantees can propose to train people to help them upgrade their skills.

The third one, Training in Education Research Use and Practice, is based on a recurring theme, which is to help researchers produce research that is rigorous and relevant to folks who actually are using it in the field—other researchers and, importantly, practitioners and stakeholders who are working in schools and school settings. Again, you will notice that there were a few slight modifications made on this RFA on May 9th, so you will want to make sure that you have the newer version of that RFA as well.

One thing I want to mention is if you start to look at some of the RFAs, you will notice that those five goals I laid out under the Education Research Grants Program (Exploration, Development, Efficacy, etc.) are very standard ways in which IES approaches its work. You will see that there is a lot of commonality in the way that we talk and the requirements that we set—for example, important components of efficacy studies as described in the Education Research Grants Program RFA are reflected in many of the RFAs. I would encourage you to take a look at some of these RFAs. You might not have been thinking about them. Coming into this webinar you may have been mostly focused on the Education Research Grants Program, but you may find that there are opportunities in these RFAs to do work that is similar to what you are thinking about, or perhaps extend it in new directions that you hadn't considered.

Slide 44

Let's take a look at the maximum award amounts for which you can ask. This is the highest that your budget can be in an application. I want to emphasize here that, currently, we state in the RFA that any application that asks for more money than these stated amounts will be deemed nonresponsive and they won't even be reviewed. Pay careful attention to the maximum funding amounts and the maximum years that are in the RFA.

I should point out, too, that you don't have to ask for the maximum. Your job is really to propose funding that will support the work that you want to do. The work in our grants is highly varied, depending on the goal that you are trying to address and also the substance of the work. Don't feel that you have to ask for the maximum amount of funding.

Question: *"Are there significant differences in the RFAs that were revised or reposted on May 9th? Are they detailed in the RFA somewhere, so I may direct faculty attention to them?"*

Answer: *"That is a good question. My understanding is that they were very small changes, but I don't know exactly what they were. I would recommend that you contact the Program Officers listed on the RFAs for further information."*

Let's take a look at the goals. One thing you will notice is that, as expected, Efficacy grants generally take more funding because of the cost in implementing randomized control trials in schools. In the Exploration goal, you only can ask for 2 years of funding if you are using only secondary data and a maximum budget of $700,000. If you are also collecting primary data, then the maximum is 4 years and $1.6 million.

In the Development & Innovation goal, we changed the maximum number of years to 4, but many development grants actually could be completed in fewer years. I think the fourth year was added because it becomes particularly difficult for grants that are developing professional development for teachers—it takes a long time to implement those interventions. It was very hard to get that done in 3 years, so the fourth year was added. If you put in a 4-year Development & Innovation grant, you are expected to justify the time line and why you require 4 years.

Slide 45

Here are the maximum awards for the other programs that I mentioned. Again, you will see variability in terms of the amounts of money that can be requested. The R&D centers are both 5 years, but the National Center on Developmental Education Assessment & Instruction maximum is $10 million; the Research & Development Center on Knowledge Utilization is $5 million.

Slide 46

This is an important screen to which to pay attention. This year we only have one application deadline. If you applied with us in the last few years, you are more accustomed to seeing two deadlines—one in June and one in September. Due to a number of factors this year, we have converged on this one deadline of September 4th at 4:30 p.m. DC time; I wish I could say that we have never gotten phone calls from people who were in California who somehow missed that and thought that it was 4:30 California time. That is why I am emphasizing that this is DC time.

In addition, there are very, very few exceptions made if you are late submitting. This is a decision that is made by the Standards & Review Office, so I am not involved in that decision. My understanding is that it is generally a very limited set of circumstances

under which they would accept a late application. What that means is that we really encourage you to apply early, and early means a couple weeks early. If you are at a university or a large organization, many of them will require you to give them your application anyway, because they do the upload process.

We all work to deadlines, but if you submit a few weeks early you have the advantage of getting information that your upload wasn't quite right or that your application hasn't been accepted in time to resubmit. That can happen for any variety of reasons; for example, there is a hyphen in the field where it is not allowed to occur. If you are early you will get an e-mail telling you that occurred, and then you can go back in, easily fix it, and make sure that your application is successfully uploaded. If you have that problem and it is 4:30 p.m. on September 4th, you are out of luck, because you won't have any time to go back in, fix it, and resubmit.

The next date that you will want to think about is June 6th. That is coming up really fast, and that is the date that the letter of intent is due. As I mentioned earlier, the letter of intent is highly encouraged but it is not required. We really recommend that you submit one if you are planning on applying. The substance of your work can change after you put that in that letter of intent; sometimes it does, because you will talk with a Program Officer and find that what you thought was a Development & Innovation grant really is an Exploration grant, or you thought you were going to apply to the Reading & Writing topic but it is probably better to apply under the Education Technology topic. There is no reason why you can't make those changes after you have put in a letter of intent, but having a letter of intent submitted gives you access to our full support system, and that is what is important.

Slide 47

The application package also will be posted on June 6th, and the start dates for this competition are July 1st to September 1st. The grant that you are proposing must start during that time period in 2014. The application packages actually will be available on Grants.gov. And as I mentioned earlier, you don't actually upload your application to our website. It all goes through the website that is shown here—Grants.gov.

Slide 48

Here is a picture (on the slide) of what that screen looks like. You can go into the screen and do a search. If you go up here to "Find grant opportunities," and click through, you won't have too much difficulty finding the NCER RFAs that are available, and that is where you go.

Slide 49

Let's talk once more about what you should be thinking as, hopefully, you are all excited about getting your application started. Today would be a good time to start working on it. So, you will want to go take a look at the RFAs that are on our funding website. We have already walked through what that looks like. On June 6th the submission guide will be available on our website, and the application package will be available on grants.gov.

Slide 50

After you submit your application and you get all the great e-mails saying that it successfully uploaded, you will be sitting back wondering what happens next. Well, the first thing that happens is that all the applications are reviewed for compliance and responsiveness to the RFA. This is relevant to the kinds of things that I mentioned earlier—making sure you read the RFA carefully, talking to the Program Officer, making sure that the work you are proposing to do addresses the acceptable student outcomes that are supported, making sure that the work addresses the content that is supported by the RFA, and making sure that the research that you are proposing is appropriate to the goal. If you are proposing an efficacy grant, there is already some evidence of promise for the intervention, and you have structured a rigorous test of the intervention.

In most of our efficacy trials, studies use a randomized control design. We do allow for strong regression discontinuity design when that is more appropriate. There is also an allowance for quasi-experimental design, but it has to be well-justified. It has to be for a research question that really can't be answered using a more rigorous design. Then, there is also the allowance of a single-case experimental design.

After your application is reviewed and it is deemed compliant with the RFA and the various requirements of the RFA, it is assigned to a review panel. You can go on the IES website under the Standards & Review Office and see a list of our standing panels and also the reviewers that have served on them in recent years. Each application is reviewed by two or three panel members; then, based on that initial review, those that are deemed to be competitive are reviewed by the full panel of reviewers.

As I mentioned before, the peer-review process happens apart from our program offices; Jackie and I have no input into funding decisions, nor does any other Program Officer. We think that is a good thing, because that allows us to be more free in providing you with technical assistance, which is what we really like to do.

Slide 51

We have put a lot of information on our website that we think is really useful to you. We really encourage you to look at webinars and, most importantly, participate in the webinars for the current competitions.

Slide 52

Here are some resources that we have on our website. At the top are the webinars. We also have a number of methodological sources. There are also papers that have been prepared by other areas of IES that will help you through such things as random assignment, sample attrition and many other important aspects in analyzing and designing your studies.

We have video presentations from numerous meetings and conferences that we hold on topics critical to doing good research. We have links to some datasets that are available to researchers that you may find interesting. There is information on the peer-review process. There is information on expectations for data-sharing. I failed to mention that in the Effectiveness goal there is a requirement that you include a data-sharing plan; what that plan should include is outlined in the RFA.

There is also a link to public access to research. In the last few years, and going forward, we started requiring that the final version of accepted manuscripts from our grants be uploaded to ERIC. As you know, there is a lot of taxpayer money going to support the work that you are doing, and so we want to make sure that the public has access to what is being learned from your work. There is a link here to ERIC that is very helpful for you in thinking through, the issues you might be wondering about in regard to journal submission and copyright issues. The ERIC staff are very, very helpful to our researchers in terms of how to negotiate those questions.

Then, the last link, how can I learn about IES-funded research, is actually one that we are going to look at more carefully.

Slide 53

We have posted videos of presentations that have been made at our conferences. You can look at descriptions of our research and research training opportunities and abstracts. As I mentioned, we have abstracts on our website for virtually all of the grants that we have funded, and that is really a great way to get a sense of what kinds of questions our grants study, the methods that researchers are using that are strong enough to receive funding from IES, and the kinds of students and contexts within which our grantees are working.

The last link is really good resource. It is a summary of publications that have come out of our research grants. This happens to be the NCER Publication Handbook. I believe there is also information on the NCSER website, on their homepage, about publications that have come out of their research. This is a very impressive list of all the publications that have been generated out of grants, which is one of our primary expectations for all of our grantees—publishing in peer-review journals as well as making your findings and interventions available in publications that are provided to a wider audience.

Slide 54

Here we are at the end of the webinar. Once again, I have to reiterate three points. I think that is a hallmark of any good talk. I think you are only supposed to have three points, and these, hopefully, have come across pretty consistently. First, get to know our funding opportunities website. Second, the RFAs contain a lot of detailed information so read them carefully. Third, call or preferably e-mail your IES Program Officer early in the process so that we can start the conversation about your grant proposal. As time permits, Program Officers can review drafts of your proposals and provide feedback, but as you can imagine, we have to receive those in a timeframe that actually allows us time to do a good job. I also sometimes recommend to grantees that they start off by just sending their research questions for review so that, as a Program Officer, I can take a look and make sure that it looks like those research questions would fit within the context of the goal and the topic that is being proposed.

Question: *"What is the definition of most competitive—top 50 percent, top third?"*

Answer: *"Well, historically, I believe that NCER has funded about 10 percent of the applications received, but the best source for this information is really the Standards & Review Office. They are the ones that can best answer that question for you. Up until this past year, we have been able to fund all of the applications that were deemed to be outstanding or excellent by our reviewers. So, this is the first year that NCER was not able to provide funding for all of those. We funded down the slate to the point where we ran out of money."*

Question: *"Do all applications get reviewer comments?"*

Answer: *"If the application is deemed compliant and responsive, they do. Whether you go to full panel or whether you are only reviewed by two or three reviewers, after the review process has been completed and we go through some additional processes in terms of our funding decisions, all applicants will get a copy of all the reviewer comments."*

Question: *"Would the reviewers consider research that has a qualitative component?"*

Answer: *"I would say absolutely. I am glad you asked this question. In much of our work collecting qualitative data is crucial. Usually, in the iterative design of new interventions, most people will find that they want to do interviews, case studies, or surveys to find out whether an intervention is feasible or useful and to gather information about fidelity of implementation. I think the key is that most of our grants do not only utilize qualitative methods—a design that only utilizes qualitative research probably wouldn't be able to meet the requirements of our goals. But it is your job as an applicant to make a strong case for the appropriateness of your methods in addressing your research questions.*

The bottom line is, do not be afraid to contact us. Program Officers like to work with applicants. We really look forward to hearing your ideas and helping to clarify the RFAs; so you shouldn't hesitate to be in touch with one or more of the Program Officers with your ideas."

Thank you for joining us today, and we will look forward to working with you on your application.

Slide 55

This concludes today's webinar "Basic Overview," part of the Research Funding Opportunities webinar series. Copies of the PowerPoint presentation and a transcript from today's webinar will be available on the IES website shortly. Thank you, and have a wonderful day.