Institute of Education Sciences
Funding Opportunities Webinar Series
Grant Writing Workshop for Minority Serving Institutions

Webinar Transcript

June 5, 2013

U.S. Department of Education

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

IES Funding Opportunities Webinar:
Grant Writing Workshop for Minority Serving Institutions

Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education

Katina Stapleton, Ph.D.
Program Officer
National Center for Education Research

Meredith Larson, Ph.D.
Program Officer
National Center for Special Education Research

Transcript
June 5, 2013

Slide 1

Hello everyone. This is Katina Stapleton, and I am a Program Officer within the National Center for Education Research (NCER). We are very excited to be here with you today. My colleague, Meredith Larson, is also here. Please do feel free to ask questions throughout the webinar as much as possible. We will respond when the question is given, but some of them we might hold until the end of the presentation.

Slide 2

Why are we here today? Over the past several years, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), and in particular, NCER, has been really concerned about helping minority-serving institutions (MSIs) receive a larger share of grant funding. Today we would like to increase your awareness of the types of funding opportunities that we are offering and give you specific tips on the grant application process; hopefully, larger numbers of you will apply and larger numbers of you will successfully receive grants from us.

Slide 3

The first thing we want to do is make everyone aware of what we are funding this year and also how to find out what our priorities are in any given fiscal year.

Slide 4

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is the larger federal agency that we are part of, and ED's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. ED is split up into several divisions, one of which is our home—IES.

Slide 5

IES has several missions that were part of our founding legislation. One of the things we are expected to do is describe the condition and progress of education in the United States. Most of that work is done through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

We are also trying to identify practices that help students learn. Most of this work is done through our center, NCER, and our sister center, the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). The last thing, evaluating effectiveness of federal programs, is done mostly through the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE).

Slide 6

We thought it would be helpful for you to see how IES is structured. We have an Office of the Director and then we are split into the four centers that you see below (on the slide): NCEE, which does evaluations; NCES, which does a lot of large data collections and assessments and things like that; then to the right are our two research centers (NCER and NCSER).

We also have a board that sets out guidelines for IES and a Standards & Review Office (SRO); we are going to talk about them more in depth later, but SRO is the unit that oversees the application process—so it is important that you know who they are and their role.

Slide 7

Today, we are going to narrow our discussion of funding opportunities to NCER primarily, with a small word about funding opportunities from NCSER. When you are thinking about putting together an application for us, you really want to start by thinking about the Center's mission. What is it that NCER seeks to fund?

NCER funds research in areas that address prekindergarten to adult education. NCSER funds similar research, but NCSER's age range starts with infants and toddlers, and they are primarily focused on students with risk of disabilities. At the upper end, NCSER research typically stops at high school.

Slide 8

Each of these two centers, NCER and NCSER, tries to fulfill their goals by funding research in several different areas. One of them is to develop or identify education interventions—we have defined interventions pretty broadly as practices, programs, policies, and approaches that improve academic achievement.

We want to fund research that can be used to help improve student outcomes widely. We want to fund research that also identifies what does not work so that we can figure out what changes need to be made to improve student outcomes. We want to fund research that looks at the underlying processes that lead to successful interventions, and we want to know why some interventions are effective under some conditions and not others.

Slide 9

Now we want to give you an idea of the type of funding that we have given to date. I want to start with a caveat—just because this is what we funded in the past does not mean our portfolio will be allocated in the same way in the future. As you could see, our largest investment is in the Education Research Programs. This is NCER's primary funding mechanism for education research. We fund a great deal in research and development (R&D) centers, and then our next two largest categories are predoctoral research training and our Reading for Understanding Initiative.

Today's discussion is mostly going to focus on the education research competition, though we are going to discuss some of the others that are being competed this year.

Slide 10

NCSER, our sister center, has not been around as long, though it has, more or less, the same structure that we do. Their largest investment has been in the Special Education Research Grants program.

Slide 11

We have put this presentation together so that we address both the basic overview of what we do and also provide targeted advice to MSIs based on discussions that we have had with MSI researchers and MSI umbrella organizations. We have an assortment of different MSIs represented on the line today, and we expect that a number of you are researchers at MSIs. A number of you are probably deans that are looking into investing in research or are from sponsored program offices. So, we are trying to address some of the questions you might have at each of these different levels.

Slide 12

We wanted to start by giving an overview of funding opportunities that are available for MSI researchers.

The most important thing is that there are no targeted funding opportunities. IES has open requests for applications (RFAs), and anyone who is capable of doing the research can apply. Any institution, that is, not individuals. There is only one program, the Small Business Innovation Research program, which is restricted to small businesses.

In all other cases, any institution that has the capacity to do research can apply, and that is really important. We encourage you to look at the research programs in which we give the most funding. These are our Education Research Programs and our training programs, though you should also pay special attention to our other opportunities because they may align with what your researchers do.

If you get absolutely nothing else from today's presentation, we want you to take away the idea that IES Program Officers are here to provide technical assistance to you. Each individual Program Officer within NCER and NCSER is available to you. You should e-mail the Program Officer associated with your research area of interest to talk to them about your work, ask questions, get feedback, et cetera. Unlike some funding agencies, we are able to talk to you at length. Our only constraint, really, is time. You should e-mail first to see if you are able to get on someone's schedule (the earlier the better).

Slide 13

If you are a researcher at an MSI, where should you get started? Applying for a grant is a long-term investment. You should think about this as a process that started when you first got an idea about this individual education problem that you wanted to solve all the way through the acceptance process. This application process might involve a rejection, but you should keep trying.

Slide 14

To get started, we have broken this part of the presentation into two sections. I first want to talk to MSIs as institutions, so for a moment I will be mostly speaking to people from sponsored program offices and people in leadership roles.

This is what we think you should be doing to help researchers on your campus learn about the funding opportunities at IES. Our opportunities are first listed in the Federal Register. So if you receive Federal Register notices or go to this website, you will get early notice of what we are looking to fund for the following fiscal year. Right now, of course, the Federal Register has our fiscal year (FY) 2014 opportunities and next year the first news of our FY 2015 funding priorities will also come out in the Federal Register. It is always helpful, as an institution, to know a little bit more about what we want.

The Federal Register notice is really just a list. It doesn't provide any in-depth information about the content of what we are looking for, so it is really helpful if you go to our main funding page (I will show you a screenshot of that in a minute) to see what our priorities are overall and the specific competitions that are being competed in a given FY. Even more important, I think, is really understanding who is on your campus that might be eligible for funding from us and nurturing that.

Across our grant programs there is a mixture of disciplines. We have researchers coming out of psychology, sociology, political science, education, cognition, engineering, et cetera. We encourage you to look across your campus to see where the talent is, what the research projects are, and how they might overlap with our funding priorities.

Slide 15

Once you know what RFAs are available, you want to make sure your researchers are aware of them as well. As an institution, you can set up meetings with us. We have in-person meetings with teams that come to DC (though that requires some advanced scheduling). We have had specific webinars for campuses in the past. We can also host video conferences. If we have enough interest and enough advanced notice, we could do something specifically for your campus. Unless you are local, and by that I mean within a 15-minute drive of us, we probably would not be able to physically come to your campus. For those of you in the DC metropolitan area, we may be able to visit. For others, we would need to use technology.

Slide 16

One of the things that we think would be really helpful to MSIs is to form research partnerships or to participate in research partnerships. We think that research partnerships provide a much stronger platform for submitting applications across all of our research programs. Many strong applications come from teams of researchers at different universities and from people that are involved in research networks. Sometimes these networks are informal: Researcher A knows researcher B and they decide to work together. There are also formal research consortia—research networks—available at the local and national level.

For example, there is an MSI in the Baltimore, MD, area that has partnered with another university, and they work together on research related to the Baltimore school system. There is a Mid-Atlantic historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) research consortium. There is also a national research consortium for MSIs. I am not using any names because I don't want to promote specific research networks, but I encourage you to look into them on your own. You can also think about making partnerships with your local educational agencies (LEAs), state educational agencies (SEAs) or research labs to conduct research.

One of our cautions is sometimes that your institution's membership in a research network may not trickle down to individual faculty members. It is really helpful if there is awareness on your campus of what these institutional relationships are, so that individual faculty can take advantage of them. Later on in the presentation, we are going to talk about some very specific funding opportunities we have for academic institutions that have partnered with LEAs and SEAs.

Slide 17

Now we are going to turn from MSIs (as institutions) to individual researchers who are at MSIs. Some of the advice is very similar. We think that you, personally, would benefit from knowing about our funding opportunities so that you don't have to be dependent on your institution sending them to you. Everybody knows how high the volume of e-mail is on a college campus—so you might delete funding notices (as spam) that actually would have interested you.

As a researcher, you should sign up for the IES Newsflash so that you will receive an e-mail when there are new RFAs. It will also be helpful to you if you were to go to our website to see our priorities and our current funding opportunities.

Slide 18

we have several assumptions. We assume that you are on this webinar because you want to help make schools better. We think that you have a research agenda already or you might be a new researcher who is trying to carve out your space in the world. To conduct research you need funding and we think that NCER might be able to help you.

We assume that each of you has an expertise in whatever it is that you do—the topic area and also different levels of methodological expertise—and we also think that you have varying levels of familiarity with actually writing grants. What we are trying to do today is give you a broad overview (but also some targeted tips) that address people's different research interests, types of studies they might conduct, and levels of familiarity with writing grants.

Slide 19

One of the most important things in the grant application process, of course, is actually finding out what funding is available. We suggest that you start by identifying the appropriate funding opportunity. That doesn't start with us; it actually starts with you. Look inward to see what you would like to study over the next several years of your life; then see how that overlaps with our funding opportunities.

For example, go to our website and then download our RFAs to see how your interests overlap with our priorities. Then contact us, by e-mail preferably. It is much easier to reach a Program Officer by e-mail rather than by phone.

You might ask yourself, "Why would I want to e-mail a Program Officer?" I think that Program Officers are probably the best kept secret at IES. We are here to help you. A large part of what we do year-round is provide technical assistance to applicants, including general or very targeted feedback about the appropriateness of your work.

Slide 20

How do you identify the appropriate funding opportunity? First, go to our website—http://ies.ed.gov/funding. At the top (of the webpage), it has a really clear description of the application process, starting with identifying the current funding opportunity. Click on that little link where it says "Current Funding Opportunity." The screen will scroll down to show you what is being competed this year.

Slide 21

Once you go to that website, you will see the current RFAs—there are a number of them. We are going to go down the list, but the main one that you will probably be interested in is the Education Research Programs RFA (84.305A). Within that RFA you are going to see a list of topics—Reading and Writing, Mathematics and Science Education, Education Technology, English Language Learners, et cetera. Find the topic that sounds closest to what it is you do. Next ask yourself, "What kind of study do I want to conduct? Do I want to develop an intervention? Do I want to see if this policy is actually effective? Maybe I want to develop a measure, et cetera." Based on the type of question you want to answer, you will be able to identify the goal that is appropriate for your research. We are going to discuss topics and goals more in depth in a few minutes.

If this is confusing, you can go online to view our abstracts, which can be sorted by topic and goal. This will give you examples of the types of projects we have funded in the past under different topics and goals. Again, if all else fails, just e-mail a Program

Officer to discuss your work and say, “Where should I apply?” He or she can help you identify the proper topic and goal.

Slide 22

What are we funding this year? Again, our core RFA is Education Research Programs. The CFDA number for Education Research Programs is 84.305A. We also have opportunities for research training programs, for R&D centers, and for research on statistical and research methodology. We also have an entirely new RFA for people who are going to do research in collaboration with LEAs and SEAs. We are going to spend the bulk of this presentation on the first RFA, 84.305A, and then at the end, we are going to give you a brief overview of the other funding opportunities.

Slide 23

Our sister center, NCSER, is really in a special case this year. NCSER is not going to be able to hold a research or research training competition for FY 2014. However, if funds do become available, they are going to fund applications that were submitted for FY 2013. If you are interested in doing special education research, more likely than not, you will have to hold off applying until FY 2015.

Slide 24

There are some exceptions.

Some special education researchers might be eligible to submit research to a very narrow set of opportunities at NCER. Pay special attention at the end of the presentation when we speak about the 84.305H RFA, which is the program where we fund research with LEAs and SEAs. Also, if you conduct research at the postsecondary and adult education levels, that topic within our main 84.305A RFA allows for research on adults and college students who have disabilities. Dr. Larson, who is here and is going to be doing a portion of the presentation, is the Program Officer for that topic; she is always happy to talk to you about your work if you e-mail first.

Slide 25

On that note, I am going to turn the presentation over to Dr. Larson.

Hello everybody, this is Meredith. Let’s move on to take a closer look at the topics and the research goals within the 305A grant competition. I just want to reiterate, because this question came up a couple times about whether NCSER was going to be competing, no, they will not be. Some of the information that we will cover, especially the information under the research goals, is relevant both for NCER and NCSER.

Slide 26

What sort of research do we fund here at IES? The first thing you should ask yourself is what you want to do and the type of question it is that you want to answer. This includes figuring out what the underlying issue is, and then determining whether this fits in with IES grant topics. This is where it is good to run ideas past Program Officers, because you may think that perhaps you don't have an eligible idea, but, in fact, you do if you just focus on a slightly different question. You may think that your research fits in one portfolio but it really doesn't. We, as Program Officers, can help you fine-tune or adjust your question.

In order to determine whether your research fits into a specific topic or goal, probably the two most important questions are "What is the content you will address?" and "What is the sample (e.g., student population or teachers) that you will study?" Answering those two questions will help you determine your topic area.

Slide 27

Let's go ahead and look at the some of the mass groupings of research. You can think of things as falling into one of three or four buckets. We have prekindergarten for NCER—children between the ages of three and five, then K-12 education, and then postsecondary and adult education. For children in prekindergarten, the relevant student outcome is school readiness, which can include both academic content (e.g., prereading or early math) and the social behavioral skills and characteristics necessary for children to be successful once they enter into the K-12 system.

Inside the K-12 system, the targeted outcomes are student achievement (in areas like reading, writing, math, science) and social and behavioral characteristics that support academic learning (such as social skills, motivation, and persistence) and outcomes like dropping out, graduation, and retention.

Slide 28

The postsecondary and adult education level addresses students who are 16 years and older and outside the K-12 system. Now there is a little bit of blending here at the postsecondary level, because researchers can be looking at interventions that start in high school and transition students into postsecondary settings. For our purposes, postsecondary includes anything that happens after secondary education through receipt of a bachelor degree (i.e., certificate programs, associate degrees, and bachelor degrees). At the postsecondary level, we are interested in research that examines access, persistence, progression, and completion for any student, as well as targeted outcomes in reading, writing, math, or English language proficiency for students who are considered developmental (i.e., students that might be in remedial programs).

Under adult education, we target adult basic and adult secondary education, as well as adult English learning and GED preparation. We are targeting adult student outcomes in reading, writing, math, and English language proficiency, as well as access, persistence, progression, and completion of adult education programs. As Katina mentioned, postsecondary and adult education can cover research for students that have disabilities, or are at risk for disabilities, and the typical population.

Slide 29

Now that you have a very rough overview of the grade levels and some of the outcomes, let’s look at some the actual topic areas to see where you might fit.

Slide 30

In the current RFA, we have 10 different topics. Many of them are focused on content areas (such as the Mathematics and Science Education and the Reading and Writing topics); some are more population-based (such as English Learners); then we also have topics such as Cognition and Student Learning, which looks at the basic processes underlying student academic success. We have the Education Technology topic, and then we also have the Postsecondary and Adult Education and the Early Learning topics, which, again, are looking at populations of younger students and then older students.

Slide 31

A couple of things have changed that we really want to highlight. Probably the biggest change in this year’s RFA is what has occurred in the Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching topic. As of the current FY 2014 competition, anything that is teacher related is being funneled into the Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching topic.

To back up a little bit, last year, if you wanted to look at the professional development of teachers teaching English you had an option to come in under Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching or under English Learners. That option is now gone. You can come in only through Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching.

However, if you want to look at professional development for Early Learning programs and policies or Postsecondary and Adult Education, you must come in under that topic area, and the same holds true for Social and Behavioral Context for Academic Learning. Everybody else studying K-12 teachers should submit through Effective Teachers and Effective Teaching.

Slide 32

Let's look at our research goals. We have five research goals, and we will talk about how they inform one another. But the first goal, "goal one," is Exploration. Second is Development and Innovation. Then we have Efficacy and Replication, Effectiveness, and Measurement.

Slide 33

The Exploration goal spawns the type of research that is meant to generate hypotheses, not test them. You are looking for associations—correlations between education outcomes (such as improvement in reading, writing, school readiness, and access to postsecondary education) and malleable factors. Malleable factors are things that the education system could influence and could affect. Things like gender or socioeconomic status are not malleable in our research context, because the education system could not change them; however, classroom time, professional development, and curriculum are malleable. A new curriculum, a new policy, a new practice, are all what we call "education interventions."

In this sort of research you can conduct either primary data collection analysis or secondary, or you can do both. I mean you can do secondary data analysis and also collect primary data. Approaches can include meta-analysis (where you are looking at what research has already been done and seeing if there is converging evidence). You can use quantitative methods, but generally we suggest avoiding purely qualitative methods; however, mixed methods approaches can be very beneficial for Exploration grants.

Slide 34

Goal two is Development and Innovation. The main purpose of goal two projects is to conduct an iterative development of an education intervention (e.g. instructional approaches, curricula, or policies) or to improve an existing education intervention using iterative development. The key here is that the development process must be iterative, meaning that there is usually a revision—maybe two or three cycles of quick tests, and then a revision.

In addition to actually developing the intervention, you also need to collect data on its usability and feasibility; meaning, "Can the people who are supposed to use this curriculum actually implement it? Can they open the computer program? Can they upload it? Can they find what they need? Does the curriculum conform to the setting in which it should be used?" For example, for a technology project you might ask, "Are there sufficient resources at the institutions to run the program? Is there sufficient time for teachers to use it in their classroom in a more typical setting?"

Finally, you need to collect pilot data of the promise of the intervention to improve student outcomes. This pilot data, we expect that it will not take a quarter or a third of the budget. Katina believes it is now 35 percent, but I will look that up and let you know.

There is a cap on how much of your budget can be used to run that pilot study, and we think it is about a third, so that should help you put this all into proportion. We really feel as though the most important part of a Development and Innovation project is that iterative development component; however, it is still important to us that you collect this pilot data of promise, because that sort of data will help you or someone else move into a goal three project, which is an Efficacy and Replication project.

Slide 35

Efficacy and Replication projects evaluate whether an intervention (policy, practice, etc.) would improve education outcomes under ideal settings. You can also conduct a replication or follow-up study where you want to continue researching an intervention that has already been shown to be efficacious. For example, you have the data that say this is intervention is helpful but now you want to follow the students or the teachers or the settings out for longer periods of time. You might want to replicate this finding in a different setting. Maybe it was done in Texas, and now you want to take it to Illinois. In some cases, you can do a retrospective analysis of secondary data.

If you think that any one of these goals might be right for you research, again, read the RFA and then try to contact the Program Officer. We are going to discuss letters of intent (LOIs) here at the very end of the presentation, and a LOI is a great place for you to start to identify which topic area and which research goal you think your research fits; the Program Officers will respond to that and give you initial feedback. If you are confused don't think it is just you. We have just stared at the RFA for a long time so we are very familiar with it.

Slide 36

Finally, in an Efficacy and Replication project you will also want to consider what it would take to implement this intervention without your assistance in a less than ideal setting. You might be looking at issues of fidelity and how much support is necessary to help teachers to use the technology correctly or consistently. You also want to consider a potential conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest. For example, if you have created this intervention yourself and then you are testing to see if it is effective, you want it to be apparent that there is going to be some sort of firewall or something to help build confidence that there isn't a conflict of interest. You are not required to do a mediator analysis, but if you can do some exploration of things that may mediate the effects of the intervention, we do suggest it.

Slide 37

Moving on to a goal four, Effectiveness, a goal four project is very similar to a goal three project because you are looking at how beneficial the intervention is. However, there are three characteristics that set this goal apart from a goal three. One of them is that goal 4 research needs to be conducted under typical conditions instead of ideal conditions. Typical conditions would be if this intervention just happened naturally, if the school picked up this new technology and started to use it by itself without the developer's help. All right, so those are routine conditions.

The second major component is that the person who develops the intervention cannot be the one running the evaluation. You must have an independent evaluator. The third thing that is important here is that before you move into a goal four, Effectiveness, project, you must have results for at least two Efficacy trials or what would count as efficacy trials in order to warrant going into an Effectiveness study.

Slide 38

Again, we expect that you can run this research under routine practice and that the evaluators are independent. You are not expected to be able to generalize across all populations, and the sample size in and of itself is not a determinant of whether it is an Effectiveness project versus a goal three project.

This last bullet is about the cost of implementation; this relates back to that idea of routine practice. A school district must be implementing this for themselves, and they should be the ones paying for the intervention and paying for its implementation. You can use some grant funds to assist in that, but, again, under routine practice it should be something that the school or district wants to do for itself.

Slide 39

The fifth and final goal is the Measurement goal. The Measurement goal looks at the development or the validation of assessments, and this goal includes the development of new assessments or refining existing ones, and then validating them, as well as validating existing assessments.

Slide 40

Each of these goals is independent; however, there is an underlying structure and the goals build off of one another. Research conducted under the Exploration goal, which is supposed to give us information to generate hypotheses, can lead to the development of interventions based on those hypotheses, or it can lead to an efficacy study or evaluation of an intervention. For example, if we find a correlation between student reading outcomes and a professional development method or a professional development training, we can look at programs that have elements similar to that professional development and test them for their effectiveness.

Goal two research should lead to a product that can then be tested in efficacy. Two successful efficacy projects could lead to an Effectiveness study. Measurement is relevant at each of these steps. The measurement tool that you create or validate can feed back into a goal one, two, three, or four.

Question: *“Can you review again the context in which qualitative research should be avoided.”*

Answer: *What I meant to suggest was that qualitative should not inherently be avoided but should probably never occur alone. Mixed methods are good. A strictly qualitative study across any one of these goals is probably going to have a difficult time.*

It is very unlikely if you have a study that only does qualitative work that you are going to get funded. It is going to be difficult to meet the requirements. When you go into the RFA, there are specific requirements for each goal for the research method, and a strictly qualitative project is probably not going to be able to meet the requirements. However, mixed-methods projects that combine qualitative and quantitative methods probably will meet the requirements. In fact, we fund quite a number of mixed-methods projects across the goals.

There are many, many studies across the goals that are actually strengthened by having qualitative work. You should absolutely take away the idea that if you are going to conduct a 100 percent qualitative study, then it is not appropriate. It is not appropriate because that work will not answer the questions that the RFA is asking.

Slide 41

You have a research idea and you are trying to figure out “What is it?” Is it a goal one; is it a goal two; it is postsecondary and adult; is it improving education systems? As we said before, to determine the appropriate topic and goal, first read the RFA, take your best guess, submit your LOI, and then talk to a Program Officer.

Let’s say you have a very large complex question and it seems to cross many goals. Let’s say you want to do some Exploration work to figure out what sort of technologies are helpful for children to learn math and then you want to develop that, and test it—that is not one project. It is actually three different projects for three different grants. In cases like this, we suggest you break the research into smaller pieces and then figure out which of those pieces you feel you have the greatest ability to answer at this moment in time.

Don't necessarily look at the goal that has the largest amount of money or that seems the most impressive or important or that you think IES might like the most. Go for the one that addresses the question you are most interested in and that suits or fits your expertise the best.

Question: *"In the Exploration goal we have a model for student development. Can choosing the measures be part of the Exploration process or do you want the measures to be chosen and proposed in the application?"*

Answer: *Both. I have seen people coming in saying, "We want to see which of these measures best predicts struggling adult readers reading ability. We have 10 of these different things because programs use all of them, and, we are going to figure out which of these we want to stick with and then use that for the subsequent years." They have outlined the set that they are going to start with and then outlined how they are going to use a process during the exploration to see which of those measures seems to correlate best with the outcomes of interest. So you don't want to make it seem like you are walking in blind, but it is okay to say that, part of the research is to figure out which of these measures correlates best or accounts for more things.*

You have to have some measures coming in, though you don't necessarily have to know every measure that you are going to look at from the start. One of the things that the panel is going to be doing is figuring out if you can answer the question that you asked. If there is no measure identified, it is going to be hard for them to judge that. Having said that, there are some people that actually develop measures as part of their goal one, Exploration, project so that is also allowable.

Just one other thing on that—the Measurement projects—sometimes people have a lot of questions about whether their research is a Measurement, Exploration, or Development and Innovation project. This can be a very daunting question for new applicants, and even some seasoned applicants. If you are trying to figure out which goal is most appropriate, you can reach out to the Program Officer directly.

I am just going to move to this slide really quickly. This is only to show you that there are different dollar amounts associated with different goals, and that is all listed in the RFA.

Slide 43

And with that, here is Dr. Stapleton again.

Hello, everybody, we are going to move through these next sections very briskly. The last 10 slides or so are self explanatory, so I think it is a bit more important that we spend time on this section and a little less on where you can go for more information.

The next part of this presentation is about the core of the application, the Research Narrative. The Research Narrative is where you explain what your project is about, what you are trying to do, and how you are going to do it. The requirements for what you have to write are going to vary both by topic and by goal, but across all applications you have to address the same four sections. We are going to go through them one by one.

Your narrative is limited to 25 pages single-spaced. If your application is 26 pages or double-spaced you are going to have a problem, so you want to attend to these types of requirements as well.

Slide 44

The very first thing you need to do is read the RFA very carefully. On a number of slides you will see what I call the "Please pay attention, this might be a problem for you," exclamation mark. I use them to indicate potential issues.

All applicants should read very, very carefully the RFA requirements for all the topics and all of the goals. However, if you are a repeat applicant, you should pay attention to changes in the RFA since last year. You don't want to get tripped up because there has been a change and you didn't attend to it. For example, earlier Meredith discussed the consolidation of the work on teachers into one large topic.

When you submit your application it is reviewed for compliance first, then for responsiveness. Compliance includes things like "Did you technically submit the application correctly, was it on time, was it the right length, were all of the sections there?" If something is missing or your application is 30 seconds late, it will be eliminated without being reviewed. Then your application is going to be reviewed for responsiveness; this is where someone reads it to make sure it meets all of the topic and goal requirements.

If you submit to the wrong topic or goal, then your application wouldn't be responsive and it would be rejected. You want to make sure that what you have written has lined up with the application requirements. There is nothing worse than spending a lot of time putting together an application and then it not even reviewed because it was either noncompliant or not responsive.

Here is another plug for the LOI, if you send us that information in advance we can give you an idea of whether your topic and goal choices would be responsive.

Slide 45

The application contains four major sections. The first one is Significance. In this section, you want to put your best foot forward from the very first paragraph. This is where you are telling the reviewers what it is you want to study and why it is important. When you are describing the project you want to make sure it is clear to the reviewer what question it is that you are trying to answer; that type of question is going to vary by goal. For example, if you are submitting to a goal three efficacy study you are looking to see whether this intervention or something else is better than another. Is it more effective? Does it increase outcomes? As an aside, we also fund studies that try to determine whether an intervention makes something worse, because they believe going in that the intervention has negative effects.

If you are going to be developing an intervention or evaluating an intervention, you have to make absolutely clear what that intervention or policy is. Sometimes we will read applications and we can't figure out what the intervention is. Sometimes applicants say they are going to study a policy but they never really make clear to the reviewers what the components of that policy are.

Again, you want to make sure it is clear what you are studying. That is also important if you are developing or validating a measure. Once you have made it clear what you are planning to do, you really have to make a case for "Why this research, why now, why do you need the money, why do you believe what you are studying is so compelling that this is the correct time and place and funding mode to do it?"

The Significance section also should include theoretical and practical justifications. Why is this work important to the field? What is the practical importance? Is this something that teachers, leaders, policymakers, et cetera, care about?

Lastly, you are going to tie all of these things together to make your case. It is important to keep in mind that applications are persuasive documents and not reports, so while you want to make sure that you have clear descriptions of what you are doing, that description by itself is not enough. You also need to make a case for why the work is important. You should also make sure that what you are writing is actually interesting. That seems like a funny thing to say, but you don't want to write something that lulls the reviewers to sleep and makes it difficult for readers to get past the first couple of pages.

Slide 46

The next section is going to be the Research Plan. The Significance section is the “what” and the “why.” The Research Plan is the “how.” In the Research Plan, you want to describe in excruciating detail how you are actually going to conduct the project. Again, what you describe is going to vary by the type of project that you have put in place.

Here (on the slides) we have a description of the Research Plan expectation for each of the goals. You want to make sure the Research Plan is actually aligned to the Significance section. One fairly common application problem is that people will make arguments in the Significance section that are not addressed in the Research Plan. For example, an applicant’s Significance section might say, “It is important that we study XYZ because we believe XYZ improves outcomes in reading at the second through fifth grade level.” But then the Research Plan says they are only implementing the intervention at the second grade level. So when writing your Research Plan, you want to consider, “If I mention this in Significance, how will I actually study it in the Research Plan.”

The opposite case also happens, where people will just drop things into the Research Plan out of nowhere without having set the case up for it in the Significance Plan. We find it very helpful if you create a table in the appendix or in the narrative that shows how the elements of your theory of change are actually tested in your Research Plan.

It is also extremely helpful if you have a timeline in your narrative or in the appendix that shows step-by-step when you will be conducting the research.

Slide 47

This year we are also asking for a dissemination plan. This dissemination plan is going to be part of your research plan. We want you to start from the very beginning thinking about who the audience for your work is—who will care about the results of your research. Then talk a little bit about how you think that you will reach them. Will you develop policy briefs? Will you have meetings for practitioners? Will you have briefings for the school districts that you are partnering with, et cetera. As part of the dissemination plan, you want to specify the actual product—that product could even be a Twitter feed—so we know how you are going to get the word out about your work.

Slide 48

Now that you have told us what you are going to do and how you are going to do it, it is time to describe who is going to do it and with what resources. It is really critical for you to build a good team. We love this graphic (on the slide) because it shows how each of the members is supporting another. Most research projects are large collaborative efforts. It is very rare, except for possibly in Exploration projects, to find funded grants that are a single researcher with a graduate student. If that is your model, you want to make sure you add people to your team.

One approach to writing the Personnel section is to start with your Research Plan. For each thing that you say you are going to do in your Research Plan, you need to have an expert to do it. For example, if you are going to conduct a survey, you should have someone on the team who is an expert at survey research (not a graduate student), because the reviewers are going to want to make sure that your team has the expertise to conduct surveys. Having appropriate expertise is especially true for applicants with mixed-methods research. Reviewers will want to know that you have experienced qualitative researchers on your team as well as quantitative researchers.

Research teams can cross disciplines and cross universities. A lot, if not most, of our applications come from teams where at least one member comes from an outside university, research firm, or nonprofit, et cetera, or from school districts.

Slide 49

When you are developing your Personnel section, remember that this is a persuasive document. It is not enough to say “Person A is going to do this.” You really need to make an argument that they are qualified to do the work. In addition to describing what the person is doing, you want to show that they have the expertise to do it. Part of that is going to be in a CV (curriculum vitae) that you attach at the end, but please do not count on that being enough. You actually need to describe in the Personnel section how each person is qualified to do the work. Again, if all the expertise is not on your campus, you might want to consider partnering with another institution.

You want to demonstrate the type of work that each key person has done in the past. Not every application requires a senior researcher, but it certainly does help your application if someone on your team has a strong record of receiving grants.

Slide 50

As you list each person, you want to make it clear what they are doing—what is their role and responsibility on the project, what are their qualifications, and equally important is the percentage of time devoted to the project. It is wonderful if you have a national expert, but if she is only on your project for 1 percent time, the reviewers might question her commitment to the project.

Question: *“How do we differentiate between co-PIs and consultants who participate on the project?”*

Answer: *We haven't really talked about this yet, but when you submit your application you are going to designate a single person as the principal investigator (PI). That person is going to be responsible for managing the grant, and providing the leadership and scientific expertise for the project. However, we allow co-PIs or co-investigators—these are people that you want to designate as a PI and share these responsibilities.*

If for example, your team is developing an education technology intervention that is supposed to improve reading outcomes and you are the person who has the expertise in educational technology and your colleague is the person who has the expertise on reading, each of you is equally important to the project. However, ultimately one of you would have to be in charge. You should pick the person you want to lead the project and that person would be the PI. Then, the other person would be the co-PI.

As for consultants, I think the main difference is that you are hiring them personally instead of hiring them through a subcontract through their institution. I think that is the most accurate way to put it. But there may be no difference in the percentage time between people who are subcontracted or consultants. If you have that kind of question, you might want to e-mail the Program Officer to talk about the plusses and minuses of going with either type of management structure.

Slide 51

I said a few minutes ago that it is better if you have a senior researcher on the team, but we, in fact, have a number of projects where a more junior researcher is the PI. If you are coming in with a national expert as the PI, make sure they have enough time on the project. Reviewers are really suspicious when someone says they are the PI and they are going to bring all this expertise to the grant, and you look and the PI has only allocated 5 percent time.

Senior researchers should also make it very clear what their qualifications are. The way the panels are set up, it is possible that there will be a number of people who are not familiar with your work. For all personnel, whether junior or senior, the CVs and Personnel sections should be used to make a case for why the person is appropriate for his/her role on the project.

Building a case is a harder for junior researchers, but it is not impossible. What you want to do is discuss where you were able to build your knowledge—content expertise and methodological expertise. It is also helpful if you could show that you have some expertise in project management so that reviewers know you are capable of managing a grant. Even still, the reviewers will probably be more comfortable with you being in charge if you have someone on the grant that you could turn to for advice. For example, you could have support from a co-PI, a contractor, an advisory board, et cetera. As a reminder, if you are going to bring somebody on your team, you want to make sure that they are actually on for enough time for the reviewers to really believe that they are working on this project.

Slide 52

Equally as important to personnel are the resources. You want to make sure that it is clear that the university has the capacity to support the work. For example, if you are doing a large-scale data analyses, do you have the computing power to do it? Do you have a designated lab, et cetera? If you are at a university that hasn't necessarily received a lot of research grants, you may want to consider partnering. This is advice that we give to most people.

If you are going to be partnering with other organizations, you want it clear that everybody is on board with what it is that you have promised they are going to do. You want to make it clear who is responsible for what, especially when there are schools and school districts involved. Everyone knows that it is very difficult to manage these relationships sometimes, and so you want to have backup plans in case your schools and districts have to pull out for some reason.

Slide 53

If you are going to be using data that do not necessarily belong to you, you want to make sure that you have permission to use these data and that you document this in the application, especially if these are datasets that include confidential data. You want to be able to show that you have the capacity to work with this data. For those who are doing research where you are merging multiple datasets, it is really important that you show that this can even be done.

This last bullet (on the slide) is critically important. It should have had my exclamation mark, but I forgot it. You must show that you have access to the data and the schools in your application. Assuming that your research is recommended for funding, we are going to ask you to update those letters so that we are sure that everyone is onboard with what they promised.

Slide 54

All right, so we have about 10 minutes left for the official webinar. I am going to go through these slides until the official end of the presentation, and then I will take additional questions for a few minutes if people have any.

What we just discussed was the 84.305A Education Research Programs RFA. Again, that is our core mechanism for funding work on education research but it is not the only one. So I am going to take a few minutes to go over the other funding opportunities. We have separate webinars for most, if not all of them, which go into depth about what is required. So this is going to be a real drive-by description of what is being funded.

Slide 55

At the top is the request that we have already discussed, the Education Research Programs. We have one for the development centers, statistics and methodologies, research partnerships, and the training programs. I am going to talk about them one-by-one pretty quickly.

Slide 56

This year we have two education and research development centers. If you are looking these up, you want to look for the 84.305C RFA.

The first center is a continuation of our investment in postsecondary education. We are funding a new center on developmental education assessment and instruction. Here we really want to look at the current instructional practices and ways of assessing whether students need remediation at community colleges and other open access institutions. We want to know what is out there, convene those who are interested in remedial education, and identify and test promising reforms.

Our second center is going to be on knowledge utilization. As a research community, we have produced a large body of knowledge and IES is really interested in learning how we can get that type of information to actual schools in districts. We want to understand how schools and districts use research and be able to develop some strategies that researchers can use to make their work more relevant and impactful on education practice.

If you have any questions about this RFA, the name of the contact person, Dr. Rebecca McGill-Wilkenson, is in the RFA. You could send her an e-mail to talk to her about your idea if this is your area of interest.

Slide 57

Again, here is more documentation of what we are looking for in these two centers. For both centers we are asking people to do research and leadership and outreach activities.

Slide 58

Please go ahead and look these RFAs up if you are interested and contact Dr. McGill.

Slide 59

Our next research program, 84.305D, is our statistical and research methodology RFA. In this RFA we are looking to fund people who are doing research on research methods, as well as methodological tools. For example, if you are trying to do a study on how to better measure the value added by school principals, or if you are trying to figure out a better way to measure effect size, or to measure achievement gaps you might submit to this RFA.

This RFA is split up into two topics so that we can encourage more early-career researchers to submit grants. For FY 2014, we have a regular statistical and research methodological grant competition and a new competition for more early-career researchers who want to, for lack of a better term, get their feet wet doing this kind of research. Again, that early career topic provides a smaller amount of money over a shorter period of time, but we think of it as an investment in our future.

Slide 60

This next RFA, 84.305H, represents a movement toward making sure our research is actually more relevant in a practical sense to schools and districts. We really want to encourage close collaboration among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and education agencies. I think that this is a really interesting opportunity for researchers at MSIs, especially those of you who have strong relationships with your local LEAs and SEAs and other types of policymakers, education policymakers around you. This RFA is split into three parts.

Slide 61

The first one is researcher/practitioner partnerships and educational research. This is essentially a planning grant. What we are doing is asking people who have existing partnerships, or those who want to develop new partnerships, to submit an application to look more closely at a specific research area and figure out what research they could conduct in the future. The continuous improvement topic is brand new, and this topic really reflects the idea that sometimes research really needs to move a little bit faster. In this case, you would have an approach, try it out, get feedback, revise, try it out, get feedback. This feedback-revise cycle is expected to happen in a much more rapid fashion than you would in a traditional research grant. The continuous improvement topic also requires a partnership between the research organization and an LEA or SEA.

The last topic is for the evaluation of state and local education programs and policies. This is a research program that we have also had for a while (under a different RFA number). In this program, we are looking for research on programs and policies that states and local districts would have implemented anyway. The research would determine whether the policy or practice is effective for improving student outcomes.

We won't pay for the actual implementation of the intervention or policy, but we will essentially top off that work by providing money to do a rigorous evaluation. Dr. Allen Ruby is the main Program Officer for these three topics, and so you should contact him if you have any questions. Again, I think that this, 84.35H RFA, is a really great entry point if you are someone who is really interested in working with LEAs and SEAs. We have the little important exclamation mark at the bottom, and that is because we have updated the RFA; you want to make sure you are working from the correct version.

Slide 62

Our research training program is 84.305B. Meredith and I are actually the Program Officers for this RFA. We are going to be offering funds for predoctoral interdisciplinary research training—that is funding to universities to develop programs to train graduate students to become education researchers. We also have training programs for methodology training, as well as training in education research use and practice. This RFA has also been updated, so you want to make sure you have the correct version.

Slide 63

Here are the parameters for the awards. You can see (on the slide) in the second column how long they can take, and to the right, the maximum award.

Question: *"Can one institution apply to more than one type of grant; for example, a planning partnership grant and also a secondary education exploration grant?"*

Answer: *Yes. In fact, an institution can apply for as many grants as they want, with a couple caveats. One caveat is that an institution can apply for only one predoctoral training program, and the other caveat is that each application must be for a different research project. In general, you only should submit as many applications as you can write well.*

I think you also need to keep in mind the distinction between the institution and the PI and the research team. Within the training program RFA, 84.305305B, there are some rules about key personnel on different grants and on different projects, but an institution (with the exception of the predoctoral training program) can submit as many training applications as it wants.

You, as a researcher, can also submit pretty much as many applications as you want. Again, we advise only as many as you can write well. You want to make sure that each application that you as a researcher submit is different. If you have any questions, you should contact a Program Officer.

You don't want to submit the same project under two different research topic areas or under two different RFAs (e.g., 305A and 305H) for the same research project.

Slide 64

We are at the end of our time, so for those of you who absolutely must leave, we want to thank for participating. Everything beyond this point, we hope, is completely self-explanatory. If you have any questions, please e-mail me, katina.stapleton@ed.gov, or Dr. Larson, meredith.larson@ed.gov.

What are your next steps? What we have here are the five steps that we think you want to take. If you go to our funding page we have this graphic there as well. Just think of it as a checklist. The first thing you want to identify is to what you are thinking of applying. You have already registered for this webinar, but there are others that you might find useful. If you are going to apply for 84.305A, there is a really long 2½-hour webinar that goes through, in excruciating detail, what is asked for in each goal. There are webinars for the other RFAs, I believe B, C, D, and H, but if you go to the webinar registration page you can see that those are available. You want to make sure you downloaded all of the materials, that you submitted the optional LOI so we can give you feedback, and then, again, submit your application on time.

Slide 65

Here are the highlights of what we think is really important. You want to make sure you talk to the Program Officers. This is an opportunity that I think it is really important that you don't overlook. Please e-mail the Program Officer as early as possible so that you can get feedback from them on your research topic. At this point, we are really close to the LOI deadline, so if you simply submitted an LOI, that will have the same effect. Program Officers contact each and every person that submits an LOI in order to give them feedback on their project.

This is Meredith. People were wondering about the timing of contacting a Program Officer and the LOIs. As Katina just said, I personally would prefer people just go ahead and submit that LOI because I have to respond to it anyway, and right now it is hard for me to schedule two meetings at the same time. If you submitted an LOI you can follow up, but do recognize that we will be responding to each and every LOI that we get.

Once that cycle has passed, feel free to contact the Program Officers as the summer progresses.

Slide 66

You want to attend to these really crucial deadlines. Again, this slide should have had the scary exclamation mark on it. The application deadline is 4:30 and zero seconds—that is not a typo. It really does say 4:30 and zero seconds (as determined by grants.gov). It is not that you started at 4:30 and zero seconds, it actually has to be completely uploaded at that time.

The grants.gov clock is on Washington, DC time. If your application comes in 1 second late it will not be accepted. We advise that you submit your application early so that you get a chance to look at it and make sure all of the parts are there. It doesn't take several days to submit your application, but it might take several days to correct it if something went wrong. You don't want a situation where your application hangs up and doesn't go through in time.

LOIs are due on June 6th. They are completely optional, but we really recommend them. We use them for two purposes; one, which we have mentioned, is to give you individual feedback; the other is so that our SRO is able to recruit the appropriate reviewers. On that same day, the application packages will be available, and the start dates are in the final column. The very earliest you would be able to actually start your grant is July 1st, and the latest is September 1st. That is really important for your research timeline. We often get people who submit timelines that start before the grant can actually start, and that is something that reviewers will notice.

Slide 67

These are the required documents (on the slide). All of them are available online at these locations. Please note that the RFAs and the submission guide, which is a separate document, are on the IES website, but the packages are on grants.gov.

Slide 68

Here is the information about what should be contained in your LOI. This is to be submitted on a completely separate website, which is iesreview.ed.gov. If you go to our main funding page that I showed you the screenshot of, which is ies.ed.gov/funding, it actually has hyperlinks to all of these things, so it is pretty difficult not to be able to locate them.

Slide 69

Question: *"Can LOIs be sent by e-mail given that the deadline is tomorrow?"*

Answer: *You can. We would prefer that you really try to put them into the system, but if you cannot make that deadline, you can mail your LOI directly to the Program Officer. Sometimes the system is open for an extra day or 2.*

The LOI doesn't enter into the review process. It does not have to be a very formal document. You don't need to have citations. This is an abstract of what it is that you are thinking. You give us details. It is usually a page long. We use those, as Program Officers, to follow up with you and get more details. Don't think that you have to sit it down and draft something over days. You should be able to pull something together in, like, maybe 15-20 minutes.

Your LOIs really help us to get an idea of how many applications might be coming in and of what type. The SRO uses this to figure out how many reviewers they are going to need to get. It is a lot simpler for us if you can put it into the system, even if you decide that you really don't want to do it later on, just go ahead and pop into the system and put something in there.

For the peer review process, we have a separate office called the SRO; they oversee the entire review process. Having the SRO separate enables Program Officers (like myself and Meredith) to be able to give you feedback. There is what we call a "firewall" between program staff—Program Officers at NCER and NCSER—and the review process. Because we are not involved in the review process, we can give you as much feedback as we have time to give you before the applications are due.

The peer review process starts when you submit your application through grants.gov, not when you submit your LOI. It is only the actual application that is going to be reviewed. It is going to be first reviewed for compliance. That is a really technical review (Was it in the right font, was it over the page limit, were all the sections there, and was it on time?).

The next review is going to be for responsiveness. That is closer to thinking about is your application responsive to the spirit of the RFA. Are you in the right topic? Are you in the right goal? But it is not vague screening. For each topic and each goal there are actually lists in the RFA of what you would need to be responsive. You want to make sure you attend to that. Did you meet the content requirements? Did you meet the year requirements? Were you over budget?

Applications that are both compliant and responsive are then assigned to a review panel. We have a number of standing panels, and that information is actually available on the IES website, if you go to the link for our SRO. The SRO will assign your application to a panel, where two or three of those members will read your application and score it. That is considered the primary review. Those applications deemed outstanding and excellent then go on to be reviewed by a full panel. This could be 15, 20, maybe even more people who would talk about your application over a 2-day meeting and then score as a group. The most competitive applications are then reviewed by the full panel. Each of those members will score your application individually. Those scores will be averaged and rank ordered, and that list comes to us as the panel's recommendations for funding. IES will determine who is funded based on that. That is a very large part of who is funded. If the panel did not give you a competitive score you won't be funded.

Slide 70

We have a new system for notification called "ANS." So 8 to possibly 9 months after you apply you will receive an e-mail notification from the system telling you the status of your award, whether it was accepted or rejected, and your summary statement. If you don't succeed the first time, try and try again. We don't have any limits on resubmissions. You would want to contact your Program Officer to discuss your feedback.

Slide 71

I am just going to really just move the mouse very quickly.

Slide 72

Sign up for additional webinars, especially the one on the application submission process; everyone should take that if you are planning to apply. This webinar describes the technical nuts and bolts of applying. If you are interested in any kind of partnerships, you want to sign up for that webinar.

Slide 73

We have other research resources online. These are conferences and workshops that we fund. You can find them.

Slide 74

We have specific resources for researchers, and we have many tips.

Slide 75

We don't really have time to go in depth, but I think what is really important to know is that the panels that are going to review contain a mix of people who are experts, probably in what you do, as well as people who are experts in education, but not necessarily in the very specific thing that you do. So you have to write both to satisfy the experts, but be clear enough that people who are not experts in your particular area would understand.

I would just add that reviewers also view the application as a whole. It is not enough to have a significant problem with a weak Research Plan or the best Research Plan in the world to answer a question that no one cares about. You really want to write a solid application that can tie these sections together.

Slide 76

Please, write as clearly as possible. It is really important that the reviewers aren't confused in any way about what it is that you are trying to do.

Slide 77

Lastly, help us to help you, contact us. Again, we prefer to receive e-mails as early as possible so that we can assist you.

Slide 78

Apply again if necessary.

Slide 79

Meredith, would you like to add anything else before we say goodbye?

No. Thank you, Katina. I think this has been very informative.

We are very serious here about the work, but we are also, I think, quite approachable, so feel free to contact us.

The Program Officers are here to help you, so don't feel nervous in any way about contacting us to talk about your work. On that note, we are going to say goodbye, and have a good afternoon.

This concludes today's webinar, "The Granting Writing Workshop for Minority Serving Institutions," 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.