Institute of Education Sciences
Funding Opportunities Webinar
Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research

May 25, 2012

U.S. Department of Education

IES INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

IES Funding Opportunities Webinar:
Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research
U.S. Department of Education
Institute of Education Sciences

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Transcript
May 25, 2012

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Good afternoon, everyone. This is Allen Ruby talking to you about the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research Grant Program (Partnership Program), a new grant program here at IES.

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I want to take a quick look at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and its mission and then go into the actual Partnership Program, its purpose, the requirements, the Project Narrative that you'll be writing, and some other sections of the application. Then, I will review a bit about preparing and submitting an application.

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The IES legislative mission is to look at the condition and progress of education in the United States, to identify education practices that improve academic achievement and access to education opportunities, and also to evaluate the effectiveness of federal and other education programs.

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Looking at the structure of IES, you can see that we have a Director appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. He is advised by the National Board for Education Sciences (NBES) and under him are the four Centers. The first Center, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) does large scale evaluations of federal programs, usually at the request of Congress or the administration, and sometimes self-assigned. Next is the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), you may be familiar with the data they gather and some of the

descriptive statistics they provide. They also run a grant program for States to develop their own longitudinal data systems.

Then, there are the two grant-making Centers, the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER); I belong to the former. This is where the Program Officers that you can talk with about your application are housed, and this is where the Partnership Grant is located.

Finally, directly under the Office of the Director, is the Standards & Review Office, which is responsible for the peer review of all grant applications. I want to point out their separateness from the Program Officers; that allows us to spend more time and work more closely with you since we have no connection with the evaluation of your grants and have little role in the decision-making of which grants are funded.

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The research objectives of the grant programs are four-fold. We're trying to identify what works to improve student educational outcomes (that way we can disseminate such interventions more widely). We want to identify what doesn't work, so that we can stop using it. We want to see what works for whom because we know not everything works for everybody—some work differently for different populations (i.e., students, teachers, schools, etc.)—and this kind of work helps us identify the appropriate places and persons to use different interventions. Lastly, we also want to understand why interventions work—this understanding helps us develop a theoretical understanding of what improves education and allows us then to build on this understanding and base more interventions on it.

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IES has a set of priorities that are developed by the Director and approved by our Board. We list the website here, if you want to look at the priorities in more detail. Two of them directly address partnerships. One is that we're trying to promote education researchers working in partnership with educational stakeholder groups. These can be practitioners, policymakers, parents, and students in order to make their research more relevant and to make it more usable for the day-to-day work being done in education. Second, we're trying to increase the capacity of education policymakers and practitioners to use the knowledge that's generated from research and to be able to identify rigorous research from less rigorous research. Both of these priorities are built into the Partnership Program.

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Within many of our grant programs, IES has been increasing the focus on partnerships. Our primary grant programs—the Education Research Grants Program and Special Education Research Grants Program—have always been able to support partnerships between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Quite a number of grants under these grant programs provide support for partnerships. It's just never been a requirement. Back in 2009, we took the next step of creating a new grant program under which researchers could join with a State education agency (SEA) or local education agency (LEA) to evaluate a program or policy being conducted or implemented by the agency. For the Evaluation of State & Local Education Programs & Policies (CFDA 84.305E) grants program, we decided that this type of work warranted a requirement for a collaboration of researchers and agency personnel.

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These grant programs—the two primary education research grants programs and the State and local evaluation grant program assumed that there was a partnership in place before the application was made and that you would come in with a fully developed research plan. There really wasn't support provided to strengthen the partnership or to develop the research plan before the actual research was done. This is a major difference between those grant programs and the new Researcher-Practitioner Partnership in Education Research grant program. This new grant program supports the development of the partnership and the research plan and provides time for some initial analysis.

I'll stress that the Researcher-Practitioner Partnership is a new grant program. We're not sure how it's going to work, but our goal is to stimulate partnerships that might not be able to get off the ground without a little bit of financial support and time.

Let me also note that we have a new training grant program promoting partnerships. The Researcher and Policymaker Training Program under our Researcher Training Programs in Education (CFDA 84.305B), supports collaborations between researchers and policymakers in order to inform the policymakers regarding the most current findings on a specific topic of their choice. We had a webinar on this grant program last week. So, if you're interested, you can look at the transcript when that's posted.

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IES is continuing to encourage joint work by researchers and practitioners to ensure the relevance and practical application of education research, to increase the use of evidence in practitioner decision-making, and also to increase the capacity of practitioners to create and use this type of evidence as well as to try to create some longer term partnerships. In a few States, we have very strong partnerships and we'd like to see additional partnerships spread over more of the country.

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Projects carried out under the Partnership grants are to complete four tasks. First, they identify an education issue with important implications for improving student achievement that is also of high priority for the education agency involved. For this type of research, the State or the district agency should be taking the lead on identifying the research question—the issue to be examined.

Secondly, the projects are to carry out initial data analyses using administrative data regarding the education issue. IES has invested funding, as have many States and districts, in their longitudinal data systems. So, it's time to really push people to take advantage of those systems. Third, if needed, additional data collection and analyses can be carried out as well.

Finally, based on the initial research, the grants are to be used to develop a plan for further research that culminates in a new application to IES. The type of work under this new application can vary. It might be for a deeper examination regarding the initial analyses that were done during the partnership grant. The initial work might have identified the need for the development of an intervention. Or there might be enough information to say, "We've identified an ongoing education intervention that may be important, but we need to know if it really works and whether the State or the district should continue using it." I'll go into much more detail on all these points as we go through the different sections of your application.

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This year, we decided to change the Request for Applications (RFAs) to help people understand what kinds of products we expect to come out of each type of grant. We've done this for the partnership grants as well.

One of these is the description of the partnership as it developed. There can be very may different types of partnerships, so it's very helpful for other people to know: What are the different models people are using for partnerships that work? What are the types of education issues that are being addressed by the partners? Again, examples for others are very helpful as they can stimulate others to do something similar. Many of these issues will occur across the country, so others may be interested in seeing what you've done on them.

The results of your initial data analyses of the administrative data is of course useful to your district and the stakeholders in your district, but it’s also helpful for other folks looking at the same issue, because it gives them a real world look at what’s going on in one State or district. Similarly, any results from other data collections or analyses that you’re doing should be made available for similar reasons. Your final product is a fully developed application that you’re ready to submit to one of our future grant competitions.

Finally, we are asking for recommendations on how you could maintain the partnership over the longer term and the lessons learned from developing the partnership. Besides hopefully being helpful to helping you support a longer-term partnership, this information can be used by others as well as by IES. Every year, as lessons are learned we like to incorporate them into our Request for Applications.

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Let’s go into some of the specific requirements for this application. One key requirement is that almost all of IES’ grant programs support work focused on student outcomes—often student academic outcomes for both regular education and special education. There may be other types of issues of high importance to a State or district. If they can’t be linked to student outcomes, however, this grant program is not the appropriate grant program to examine them.

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What do we mean by student outcomes? Well, for pre-kindergarten, we’re really talking about school readiness. For K-12, we’re looking at academic outcomes in the subjects of reading, writing, math, and science—these can be grades; course completions; test scores of some sort; high school graduation and drop-out rates; and also the social skills, dispositions, and behaviors that support academic outcomes (maintaining attention, attendance, or behavioral disciplinary referrals, etc.) and then linking them back into the academic outcomes as well.

In postsecondary education, we’re focused on non-graduate education (baccalaureate and sub-baccalaureate and the outcomes of increasing access to, retention in, and completion of postsecondary education.

Under adult education, we’re focused on adult basic education, adult secondary education, and adult English as a second language education with the outcomes of reading, writing, and mathematics. Again, these are measured by specific assessments and course and program completion.

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The application comes in from a partnership—a partnership of a research institution and either an SEA or an LEA. The Principal Investigator (PI) from that research institution must have a background in the specific education issue they're going to be addressing and must have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research—which is a requirement for all our grant programs. That doesn't limit it to any specific type of person or institution—you just have to show that you have the ability to do that type of research.

Second, the other PI must come from the SEA or LEA. That person must have decision-making authority for the issue within his/her agency. The purpose here is to show that the State or district thinks this is a very important issue—important enough that their key decision-making person will join the project and therefore (we hope) be informed by the project in their future decisions. That also means that the agency partner must be an education agency. Other agencies—such as the health, justice, social services—can be part of the application, but they are not the partner. We're looking for the education agency to be a partner.

When the actual application comes in, we always require one institution to be the prime institution; they'll have the PI. The other will be the Co-PI and receive a sub-award from the prime. There is no requirement for that to be the research institution or the SEA or LEA. It's up to the partnerships to decide who will be the lead. One consideration is which partner has the most research grant management experience might be better suited to be the lead.

Question: *"What other staffing titles can we use? It is clear there has to be a PI and Co-PI. Can there be other Co-PIs? Can there be multiple Co-PIs?"*

Answer: *Yes. You'll have to have one PI (Project Director). You can have multiple Co-PIs. You can also have Co-Investigators for people who you don't think they reach the status of a Co-PI. Then, you can have non-key personnel, of course. You may have technical people or research assistants on the project. So, there's no limit on Co-PIs and you can use other titles as well. The focus here is we need one PI from one partner institution, and the Co-PI from the other partner.*

Question: *"Does the SEA or LEA PI have to be a superintendent or principal?"*

Answer: *No. Let's say you had an associate superintendent for curriculum, and you were looking at an issue regarding curriculum. Then that would be fine. Let's say you were looking at an issue in Pre-K, and you had an associate superintendent for early learning. That could be the appropriate person to be the PI or Co-PI. Of course, if the* *superintendent wants to be the PI, they certainly could argue that they have the decision-making authority and they could join. Then, you might have an associate superintendent be a Co-PI. I don't think a principal is a good Co-PI, because we're looking at an issue across the district. So, a principal probably doesn't have decision-making authority on an issue that crosses a whole district. If there is a case like that, then you should make that point because I think most people's first impression is that you need somebody at the district-level who's overseeing the issue. If there are principals actively involved in the issue, they could join as additional Co-PIs.*

Question: *"Does the research institution have to be a university?"*

Answer: *No. If you have research capacity, then you can be the research institution. In our other grant programs, our research institutions include universities, academic hospitals non-profit organizations, and for-profit institutions that do research and show they have research capacity to do the work. That's exactly why our RFA doesn't say "university," and says, "the capacity to conduct scientifically valid research." We're less interested in the type of institution and more interested in the fact that you can do this type of work.*

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You can certainly have additional partners. You may want to have an additional SEA or LEA involved. If you do, you need to argue why they are in there. They may be in there because they have shared interests or similar characteristics. Similar characteristics may mean you're looking at contiguous districts, and so the issue crosses them easily. You also may pick different non-geographical contiguous districts because they have the same problems. You might say, "Oh, these districts have a high concentration of English learners of a specific type. They're all trying to address that issue, and we'd like to look across them to see if there are different approaches being used."

The only thing we would argue against is you shouldn't give the appearance of convenience partnerships. For example, many research institutions have connections with a number of education agencies, but if the only reason for bringing them all into one partnership grant is their connection to the research institution, that seems less strong than if they all shared an interest. We're just trying to avoid the appearance that you're bringing people in just because you've worked with them in the past and not because they're the best education agencies to address this issue.

If you want to bring in non-education agencies that certainly makes sense. Again, the education agency is the key partner. Let’s say that you were looking at education for juveniles who are incarcerated. This might be a cooperative effort between the education agency and the juvenile justice system agency along with the research institution.

If you have more than one research institution, again you should show why. What are their shared interests? How will each institution make unique contributions to the partnership?

You may want to consider bringing in some non-research organizations that will contribute to the partnership. Oftentimes, there are what we might call “advocacy” groups or other groups trying to promote certain types of interventions and they have experience you want to draw on or you may want to bring in a stakeholder group that is affected by this issue and any changes to it.

For example, let’s say a district was interested in how parental involvement in children’s education in schools could be tapped to improve the children’s education. They may want to bring in organizations that promote ways of increasing parental impact and recruit parental organizations to have a role in the project because getting their buy-in and their interest may lead to a better research partnership and buy-in for future research being done on this issue.

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One key institutional restriction is very important to remember. Your institution can only be on one application to this grant program. If you’re a research institution or an education agency, you can only join one application for the FY 2013 competition. It doesn't matter what status you take on the application (prime, sub-awardee, or even sub-sub-awardee). It doesn't matter, if different personnel from your organization want to be involved in separate applications. It doesn't matter if in your university, different departments or research centers want to be involved in separate applications. If you’re an institution, only one application can come with your name on it. That means a SEA or LEA can only join one application.

So, if you’re a multi-campus university, each campus can submit one application. Within that campus though, regardless of the number of departments that want to take part, only one application can be submitted from your university. That’s a key thing because your institution may have to play have a gatekeeping role. Your Sponsored Projects Office may have to come up and say, “Only one of you can submit, and we have to figure out a way to determine that.” It’s better that you make that determination instead of having us do so.

Now, some States may have multiple education agencies. You may have a State that has a K-12 agency and a postsecondary or higher education agency. In that case, they can submit different applications. If you're located within one education agency, only one application can come from that agency, the same is true for universities.

Question: *"Can a nonprofit organization qualify as a research institution?"*

Answer: *Yes. We do have a number of non-profit organizations who are grantees. The key point is to show that your non-profit has the staff that can do rigorous research and research grant management. That's the only key point. If you don't have staff that can do that, we would say bring in another institution that does and do a joint project.*

Question: *"Can a regional education laboratory (REL) apply for a grant under this program?"*

Answer: *There is a restriction on these RELs that are supported by IES. They can't apply as a laboratory, because they themselves are created by a grant program. The individual institutions that make up the REL can apply either individually or all together. They just can't say the REL is applying. The institutions are applying.*

Question: *"Can different research centers located in the same university apply?"*

Answer: *Only if they apply on one application together. They cannot submit separate applications, because only one application can come from the same university campus.*

Thank you for those questions.

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Let's discuss the Project Narrative. This is really the heart of your application. This is where you propose what you're doing. You have a 25-page, single-spaced, maximum to lay out your argument and describe what you're doing and show you're capable of doing this work.

There is the Significance section where you're going to explain the strength of your partnership and the importance of the education issue your partnership is going to examine.

You have the Research Plan in which you're going to detail how the partnership will be fully established, how you will develop a Research Plan to examine the issue of interest, your plans for your initial data analyses and any other collection analyses you intend to carry out, and how you will develop a full application to IES.

You have the Personnel section to describe the expertise of your research team and their responsibilities and time commitments within the project, and to show that you have all the partners that you're required to have.

Then, you have the Resources section to show that you have access to the institutional resources and relevant data sources you need to carry out the work. We'll now take some time and walk through each of these sections.

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In the Significance section, you're going to want to describe the strength of the partnership; the research aims of the project; and the issue you're going to examine and its importance to the research institution, the educational agency, other educational agencies, and the field of education research. Let's take these one at a time.

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First of all, you want to give a background on the institutions in the partnership. All our applications go through a peer review panel that's going to be made up of people from different areas of educational backgrounds. They'll primarily be researchers. There will be some practitioners who have experience with research, but they'll all have areas of expertise and they won't all be the same. You may have a well-known research institution, non-profit, or university known for a specific type of work and there will be generalists to your area on the panel. You'll want to give some background on the research institution and on the SEA or LEA. Again, the people will come from all across the country. They will probably have worked with different educational agencies in the past. So, they may not be familiar with yours. It's just a good idea to give a little background.

The point of this background you're giving is to set up the focus of your specific educational issue. You'll want to describe your common interests; complementary abilities; and how everybody contributes to, and benefits from, this partnership.

As you talk about your research institution mention some past history. Have you done similar research in the past? Have you worked with a partner like this in the past? Then, add some background on the SEA and the LEA—basic demographics (i.e., size issues, important policies involved in, etc.)—just something to give people an idea of who is involved. Again, you want to provide evidence of your capacity to work together. You'll want to show that you're well-grounded and that this partnership is not two people who got on the phone a few weeks before the submission date and said, "Hey, here's a chance to get some grant money. Let's work together." You want to show that there's been some serious thought putting together this work.

Obviously, a lot of that will come out in your discussion in the Research Plan section, but it's also worth documenting your working together in the past (if any) and in putting together this application. That means this section will actually be different depending upon whether the partnership is ongoing or new. If you already have a partnership between a research institution and an education agency that's done work in the past, you can show your partnership—your past work—but you're going to then want to answer the question, "Why do we need a new grant?" The peer reviewers may say, "These guys are working together well. What do they need a planning grant for? Why don't they just come in for a regular IES grant, since they already have this history of working together?" So, that's a key question for an existing partnership.

For a new partnership, there are different questions. Why is it important for this partnership to start up? Is this an important SEA or LEA? Is there an important issue here to be looked at? Do we see long-term commitment here that may lead to a future partnership that will really contribute over time? What are the chances for success here?" There may not be a long history to show, but you can at least show a shorter, intensive history—discussions when forming the partnership—and you want to make the argument explaining why a new partnership is important and why we should assume that this partnership will work out. This goes back to the common interests and complementary abilities as well.

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If you're bringing in other organizations, justify them. Why do we need more? The feeling is that any time you bring in more and more groups, partnerships get more and more difficult to work within. Management becomes a much bigger issue. Competing interests and time commitments are much more difficult to deal with. On the other hand, it may make the approach much stronger. So, you want to show why you are bringing in more institutions and explain how they contribute to the partnership.

For a SEA or a LEA that has a partnership with someone else already, you should note that and then argue why this new partnership is important and how it will help you provide non-overlapping research support. Make a clear distinction (e.g., we have a partnership with this group on this topic. They don't have the expertise we need for what this other group can provide, so we'd like to bring them in and form a new partnership with them). You just don't want anybody to think that your work will be duplicative of what you already have going on.

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Then, there are the longer-term possibilities for the partnership (these grants are short-term grants, lasting only 2 years). The hope is that some of these partnerships will grow deep roots and go on for a longer term. Try to show that you have long-term research interests together; that you're thinking about structures that will continue to support joint work, joint identification of research issues, and joint research; that you are developing longer research agendas and plans that will go 5 or 10 years into the future. We would expect to see applications from this partnership, possibly every year or every other year, and that you're considering developing grant applications to support this type of work.

We all know that a key problem in partnerships is change and turnover in leadership. New leaders come in. They say, "What is this partnership? I didn't create it. What does it bring me, or does it constrain me from doing what I want to do?" Show that your partnership is thinking about different structures that could be put in place to help maintain a partnership over the longer term when leadership changes occur—maybe committee structures or some sort of shorter term products that show the value of the partnership to both groups.

Additionally, we're also interested in improving the capacity of SEAs and LEAs to do their own research and actually use results from research in their decision-making. Address how the partnership will support this purpose as well.

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Let's move on to the significance of your research aims. You want to clearly describe the education issue your partnership wants to examine. Again, as I mentioned, there will be people on the panel who may not be familiar with your issue. You may be focusing on a specific population or a specific topic area and they may have never read an article on this. Spend a little time clearly describing the issue in detail, why it's key to the SEA or LEA, and show how it's linked to specific student education outcomes. If you can't link your issue to student academic outcomes, it may be an issue highly important to your agency, but you really shouldn't propose it.

Let me just give you an example—student transportation. This is a very important issue to many districts. It's very expensive and some districts are looking for different ways to reduce the cost of transporting students. For example, some of them are looking at how to adjust their bus schedules. It would be very difficult to argue that a project focused solely on the most economical bus schedule for a district is linked to student outcomes; so it might not be appropriate. Conversely, you can think of other issues where transportation comes in. There's the argument that high school students should actually be going to high school later in the day—that waking them up early means they don't get enough sleep and don't pay enough attention in class. You could argue from that point that we need to adjust bus schedules to help older kids do better in school. You might look at high school absences or performance in early classes to see if that's a possibility and then do some work on transportation issues.

Another transportation issue, especially in some rural districts, is that they've moved to, or they're thinking about moving to, a 4-day week in order to cut transportation costs. A clear research questions is whether the reduction in days reduces student academic success. Make sure your issue links to student academic outcomes. I just keep reiterating that. Otherwise, you may not be making good use of your time by submitting to this grant program.

Question: *"Is it possible to build a partnership with someone other than a SEA or a LEA, such as the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaboration?"*

Answer: *Again, not as the key partner PI or Co-PI. You are going to have to have a State or a district education agency as your co-partner. You could then bring another partner into the collaborative. They could be a Co-PI and that way you could get access to their data and expertise on the issue. The partnership has to be specifically between a research institution and an SEA or LEA. Bringing in collaboratives or associations is encouraged if they support the program, but they have to be brought in as an additional member.*

Question: *"How detailed should the aims and research questions be at this initial stage?"*

Answer: *They're going to have to be specific enough that you can convince the review panel that it's worth spending money on the initial research. You're going to be asked to do some initial data analysis. You're going to have to have strong enough aims and research questions to justify the research analysis that you're going to do. It can't just be generic (e.g., "We want to examine a whole set of issues under something and find the best one to do future research in."). I think the RFA notes, for example, a general issue of student mobility. If a district knows that a large percentage of students seem to move every year—either within the district or outside the district—that's specific enough. Then, they could say, "We want to look at our data to determine who is moving, where they're moving from, where they're going, and perhaps discovering how the students who move compare on their test scores and graduation rates versus those who don't move and then look more specifically at why the people are moving. Are they moving more from one certain type of school to another school? Do we see schools using different approaches to either working with new students coming in or trying to retain their students? That's still a very general issue of student mobility, but it's specific* *enough that we could start thinking about some concrete data analyses we'd like to do and some future data collections we'd like to do to understand it better.*

The last key issue regarding the research aims answers the following question. How is this knowledge going to be useful to the agency's practice? The purpose of this work is to develop research and propose future research that can be used by the educational agency to make decisions. You've got to keep bringing it back to practice. Show this is an important issue to the district. Have they done work on it before? Does it fit within their current priorities? Show that the district cares about this issue and really needs this type of research to help its future work.

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Then, as an issue of secondary importance which still contributes to the significance of your work, is showing that other educational agencies (State or local) also view this as important and are perhaps working on it. If you can show this you get some generalizability—there's a broader importance to the work you're doing; it may inform what other people are doing.

Also of significance is the contribution this work may make to academic education research? Can we push the literature forward by looking at this issue? Has the literature gotten stuck or failed to address this issue because nobody has gone out in the field and looked at it? Is it a hot topic on which further research would contribute to the discussion about it? Again, topics that are more generalizable to the area of research or more generalizable to practice across a broader geographic area gives greater significance to the work you're proposing to do.

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Let's move on to your next section—the Research Plan. Under this, you'll want to discuss how your partnership will be established or was established previously, how you're going to develop and refine a research plan for the future examination of this education issue, what specific data are you going to analyze, and what type of analyses do you intend to do. If you're considering future data collections and analyses to support the secondary data analyses you're proposing, what might they be? How are you going to go about developing a grant application for future support? You're working in a partnership, so there's got to be a partnership approach to developing the future application and the research it includes. That's going to take additional effort compared to developing the grant on your own.

Just a caveat here: If you already have a research plan for future work that could be implemented now, or if you already have an intervention you want to develop or evaluate now, this is the wrong program to apply to. You should really apply to our

Education Research Grants Program or our Special Education Research Grants Program that can also support partnership work (but the type of partnership work aimed at what you could do right now with little or no pre-planning to carry it out). That's part of the purpose of a Program Officer. Talk to us. If you have an idea, say, "Where do we fit better, before we start working on this?" We can direct you to the right grant program.

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Let's go into developing the partnership. Again, the idea of developing this partnership is you're doing this around research on the education issue. I'm not being flippant here, but we're not doing team-building exercises. We're not doing getting-to-know-you activities or dinners. You're coming together to do work on a specific education issue. That means any type of activities you do to form the partnership should be built around this education issue and doing further research on it.

How are you going to maintain this partnership and deepen it over the course of the project? This can be shown by detailing some structures you're going to put in. How often are the partnership personnel going to get together in-person, by phone—regular meetings, regular discussions? How are decisions going to be made on the research direction? How is the initial research going to be done? Is it going to be done jointly with somebody from each group coming together? Is the research institution going to do the research, present it to the State or local partner, get a response, and then go back and do further work? How will the results be looked at? Will you make the results public to allow other groups to have a voice in what's going on? Are there going to be activities that are going to be looking at the long-term effects? How will you maintain this partnership over the long-term—developing a longer term research agenda?

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When developing your future research plan, you want to describe some of these processes that you're going to use to develop the research plan to be carried out under a future project and make sure that it addresses student outcomes and sticks to the education agency's priorities. Just how will you develop the research plan? You may narrow down the issue as you learn more, vet research directions, present work, increase the agency's research capacity, and perhaps hold joint review processes for releasing the results and including stakeholder input.

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Your initial analysis is probably the most concrete and analytical part of the Research Plan because you have to carry out some initial research analyzing administrative data from the SEA or LEA. That means you're going to have to know something about the data before you come in for this grant. So, you want to discuss how the analysis of data will contribute to understanding the education issue and to the development of the research plan. You’re going to have to describe what administrative data you’ll be analyzing, what population it represents, and whether you are taking a sample from it or using the whole thing. What are its strengths and weaknesses with regards to the issue you want to examine? Just be fair about that. Everybody knows data has good and bad points. What are the key variables you’ll be looking at, and what are the measures of student outcomes? Are you measuring student outcomes in this somehow? Then, describe the specific initial analyses to be done. Now of course, as you do the initial analyses, it’s assumed things will crop up—other areas of exploration—and you’ll have to follow them to understand. However, what are the initial early ones you’re going to do that will lead to the later ones? Those should be laid out.

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You also may propose additional data collection and analyses. This may include looking at other data or it may actually be going out and doing some field work. You may say, “We’re going to look at a couple of schools, because we know we need to look at this issue not only through secondary data analysis, but we need to go into schools and see what’s going on.” So, you may propose doing that type of work to gain a better understanding—why we need this primary data collection and analysis to understand the education issue and the development of our research plan.

It may be that this data collection depends on the results of your initial analyses. For example, I mentioned before that when looking at student mobility, you may find one or two schools with high mobility. So, in that case, you don’t have to actually identify the schools at which you found the mobility. You might say, “If we found this in our initial data collection, then our next step would be to go out and look at this. If we didn’t find that in the initial collection, we’d address that by going out and collecting additional data on that.” So, just having some potential additional data collections based on the results of your additional work is also acceptable.

Again, you want to talk about what kind of data you’ll be collecting and the strengths and weaknesses of it. If you’re doing surveys or interviews, you’ll want to talk about what type of instruments and measures you’ll use, the key variables, and how you’ll analyze the data.

If you’ve already done some past work on this—certainly the district or the research institution may have done some initial analyses that you want to build on—then describe those analyses and show how they feed into your proposed additional data collection. That would be seen as a strength as long as the work hadn’t been done already and you’d have a foundation to start.

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The focus of your initial and additional analyses will of course depend on the State of knowledge regarding your education issue. You may be going into something that's very exploratory, or you may be going where a lot of past work has been done that you're building on. For example, the RFA uses the example of students who come from immigrant families. We have many districts in the country that are experiencing an influx of immigrants for the first time, and they are dealing with that issue for the first time. The students who come from different backgrounds may have different primary languages. Such a district may say, "Okay, we know that we have a lot of these students. We really don't have a good accounting of where they're from, what their skills are, or how they're doing in our schools. We want to do some very exploratory work to see who we're dealing with, how many, what type, and how our schools and teachers are responding." This type of work initially could then lead to a proposal for longer, more in-depth work of this type to get a good handle on what's going on in the district. In the future, it may then lead to the development of interventions to support these students so they succeed in school.

On the other hand, you may have a district that has a history of such students with programs already set up—though schools may have set up different programs to help these students. The district may have set up programs and now asks, "Wait a minute, how are we doing? Are we really succeeding with these students and which of our programs seem to be more successful than others? Let's take a step back and do an accounting of how many of these students we have, what types, what different programs are they in, and look at how they seem to be doing in the different programs." This might set up an evaluation in the future—for example, we seem to have four different types of programs or approaches. We need to causally evaluate which of these are most useful for which type of children, and then go back to IES with such a proposal. So, the proposed research plans will differ on the state of knowledge of the education issue you're examining.

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Then, you need to address how you will develop the future application (a process and a timeline). It's going to be a very speculative timeline because it's early on in the process. What are you going to propose to do in this partnership to develop the future application? How will you obtain commitments from the different people who have to be involved in this future application—the research personnel, the districts, people who have data, maybe the stakeholders? Then, as you develop it, as the new work is done, how are you going to maintain a focus so that any new proposed work is geared toward helping the SEA or LEA improve student outcomes? For example, you may want to have an oversight group that reviews the development of the application and says, "Hold on, you guys are off track here" or "You're not looking at student outcomes strongly enough. Bring that back in."

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We assume that most applications will be written for our primary research grant programs, which are the Education Research Grants Program and the Special Education Research Grants Program. For both of these programs, you apply under a specific topic area and research goal. So again, talking to the Program Officer about those combinations can be very helpful as you start to develop your work.

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I'll just very quickly show you what we mean by topic areas. For the Education Research Grants Program, we have these 10 topic areas. Some are academic areas, like math and science, English, and reading and writing; others are age-level areas, like early learning and postsecondary education; while still others are specific groups, such as English learners. We can certainly give you more information about each one as you decide.

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The Special Education Research Grants Program has 11 topic areas. Most are similar to regular education topic areas. There are a few that are very specific to these students though, for example, Autism Spectrum Disorders and looking at supporting families of children with disabilities.

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What do we mean by research goals? We have five research goals you can apply under. We have a webinar on each one of these. It's probably worth looking them over as you write your application. Exploration is very similar to the initial type of work you're doing in the Partnership Grant. You're looking for relationships between malleable factors and student educational outcomes. By malleable factor, we mean any factor that can be changed by the education system. It may be a characteristic of a student, a teacher, a school, school climate, parental involvement, or a district policy or a program—these are all malleable factors. Exploration projects carry out non-causal work looking to identify relationships.

Our second goal, Development & Innovation, is where you actually develop and pilot test the new innovation to see if it can actually be used in an education setting and if there is any promise that it can improve student outcomes.

The third goal, Efficacy & Replication, is where you carry out a causal evaluation of an intervention; it can be under ideal conditions. In Effectiveness, you're doing an independent causal evaluation under routine conditions. Finally, Measurement is where you would develop and evaluate an assessment. So, if you apply under either of these two grant programs as you develop your application, you would work with us on which combination of these topics and goals makes the most sense for the work you want to do in the future.

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There is one other grant program called the Evaluation of State and Local Education Programs and Policies that might be appropriate. If you in your initial work identified a State or district program or policy that seemed to be linked to improving student outcomes and you said, 'You know, we really ought to do a causal evaluation of this." It actually should be for two reasons. If it seems to be linked, you may say, "Let's see if we can prove that it's well-linked because that would be very important for us and for others," or if you're not sure it's well-linked and you're spending a lot of time and money on it, you may say, "Let's test to see if this really has an impact. If it doesn't, we shouldn't be doing this anymore."

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It doesn't seem we have any questions on the Research Plan. Let me move on to the last two sections, the Personnel and Resources sections.

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You want to identify all your key personnel on the project, especially (as I keep reiterating) who the PI and Co-PI are, and whether they are from the appropriate research institution and education agency. We don't have a preference; the PI can come from either organization and the key Co-PI must come from the other one. Whoever's coming from the education agency must have decision-making authority for the education issue being examined.

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You want to discuss the expertise of the key personnel so that you show they can do the work—they have the ability to do the work and that they have the qualifications to address the education issue, both on the research side and decision-making side. You want to identify their roles and responsibilities within the partnership. You want to show their commitment, because if there's not a large time commitment, then there's probably going to be some skepticism that they're really going to contribute to the project. Sometimes SEA or LEA personnel can't charge for their time, but they can give commitment for their time. That's fine. You can put them in the budget saying they're going to work on this a certain percentage of the time but that 10% of their salary will not be charged to it. That’s acceptable. It’s just important to have a commitment from them that they’re going to give that much time to the project. Of course, showing experience working in this type of partnership in the past also gives some support that this work will be done well.

Another issue is project management. It’s important to show that somebody in the leadership team has managed this type of project in the past, ensuring that this effort won’t fail due to a lack of management skills. This is tricky because we are talking about two different types of organizations working together, possibly more.

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For the Resources section, describe what strengths and institutional supports are in place to help this work along. It can be basic things (e.g., research assistance, library supports, etc.) as well as making sure that if you’re going to be doing work out in schools and districts, you show that you have access to them. It’s very helpful if the district says, “We’ll give you access to our schools,” but it’s even more helpful if the principals then say, “Oh, the districts have asked us to give access to this work and we agree. We will give access.” The more support you can show within the State or the district, the stronger the institutional resources are shown coming from that agency.

If you’re going to be looking at any data sets, it’s very important to show that you have access to the data sets. Oftentimes, the data is controlled by a different part of the State or district agency than the people in charge of the issue. You may have an assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum as your Co-PI, but it’s certainly nice to say, “We have somebody from the Evaluation Office who’s on the team too. They’re our access to the data we’ll be looking at,” and a letter from them saying, “Yes, we’ll make this data available for this project.” These are two ways of showing strong institutional resources.

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To help you show your access to resources, we have an Appendix C where you must include Letters of Agreement from all the institutions that are involved in the partnership—documenting that they’re going to take part and cooperate. The more details you put in this, to show that they know what they’re expected to do—what their roles and responsibilities are—the more confidence the peer reviewers have that they will take part.

We’ve had projects in the past that have not succeeded because while somebody wrote a general letter saying, “Yes, we’ll take part,” when the time came for them to work they realized, “Oh, there was a large time commitment here. Somebody wanted to come into our schools and do a 2-3-hour survey twice during the year. No, we don’t have time for that.” So, the more details you have saying, “We know they’re going to come in and do surveys. We know that they're going to come in and do interviews," the stronger the reviewers' confidence in the fact that the work will actually be carried out. Again, school support helps as does the support of the divisions that hold the data. Having support documented in a letter is very helpful as well.

Question: *"Does the PI or Co-PI have to have a doctoral degree?"*

Answer: *No, there is no strict requirement they must, but then you have to show that they're capable of doing the research that they've promised to do—that they have the background—and that they've done this type of work before, they can do the work, and they can work well with others. I don't think there's going to be an expectation in many cases that the State or the district PI or Co-PI has a doctoral degree. If they're an assistant superintendent, they may or may not. Their position is that they're the decision-maker for this issue. So, they may have an Ed.D. or they may not. They may have a master's or bachelor's degree. The point for them is to say they know and oversee the issue and they know the district or the State."*

From the research institution, I would say there's probably an expectation that they have a doctoral degree. There's no requirement, but there's probably an expectation. From the agency side, I don't think there is that expectation. There may be a slight additional benefit if they do because you could say, "Not only do they have the decision-making ability, they know how to work with researchers because they understand research, so that's why we made them the Co-PI or the PI."

Question: *"Can personnel come from the research institutions other than the primary institutions?"*

Answer: *I'm not exactly sure what that means. The primary institution could be a research institution, or it could be a State or local agency. In that case, personnel from the research institution would be coming from the non-prime institution. It is possible you may say, "Oh, so-and-so at a totally different institution is an expert in this area. We want them on the project. We are going to hire them as a consultant." That's certainly fine. You could propose bringing them in as a consultant or even a sub-award to that third or fourth institution because they bring something that nobody else has.*

Research personnel can come from more than the research institution. You just don't want the research institution to be seen as a contracting company. If your research institution comes in with one person, and then you have sub-awards to six other researchers from totally different areas, you're going to have to justify that—especially if they're all coming from another single institution. You're going to have show why the latter isn't the prime. You must explain why some other institution from where these *people are located isn't the prime. If they're coming from separate institutions, it may make sense.*

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The other sections of the application are the three appendices and then the Budget and the Budget Narrative.

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Appendix A is where you may put figures, charts, or tables. You don't want to use up your 25 pages showing the demographics of your district. You create a table of your demographics and put it in Appendix A. If you're going to use a survey, you already have one in mind, and you want people to see it because it's validated—put it in Appendix A so you don't waste your 25 pages in the Research Narrative. It's a place to put things you want people to refer to. But don't put additional text describing some aspect of the project in any of the Appendices.

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If you're going to look at a specific intervention or assessment and you want to show what you're going to look at, then you can include it in Appendix B. For example, let's say you were doing a study on the tests the district uses for the placement of English as a second language students, special education students, or students being sent to remedial course work, and you want to see if the test is working well—putting people into the right places. You may want to show the test that's being used. You could put it in Appendix B and say, "Here's the test we're looking at." Then, the review panel can get an idea of what's being examined. Again, this appendix has a 10-page limit, and no text is allowed. You're not writing any narrative in these appendices. You're just putting in tables that you refer to in the Project Narrative.

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Appendix C has no page limit. This is where you put your Letters of Agreement. Again, make sure the letters emphasize their commitment, and set out the specific roles and responsibilities they're going to take on. If you have a consultant, have them put in a letter saying they are going to take part in the study. If you're going to be using data from somewhere, have the data-holders make it clear that you can use this data and it will be provided to you for this project.

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For the Budget, the maximum award is $400,000—if you don't need that much, don't ask for it. You don't get any benefits from asking for the maximum, you also don't get any award for under-bidding. If you know it's going to take $300,000, say $300,000 because the peer reviewers have looked at budgets. They've all had grants in the past and know what it takes to run research. So, try to be honest but try to be sure that if there's a problem, you don't get stuck because you don't have enough money.

The maximum project length is 2 years. There's no link between the $400,000 and the 2 years. You may have a very intensive project that you only need a year or a year and a half to do, and you may still need the $400,000. You may have a longer-term project that's small and you may only need $200,000 to do it. However, you want to spend the 2 years doing it because you think it will take that long to make the partnership work and to collect and analyze the data you need. So, you're really arguing for length and size depending on the scope of the project.

You're going to include a detailed Budget Form, which is called the SF 424. You're going to have a narrative that describes what each expenditure is for, and you want to link everything together in the narrative. For example, sometimes we'll get an application that comes in and says, "We're going to do a student survey." Then, you look in the budget, and there's no funding for a student survey. The panel immediately assumes, "Well, they're not going to do a student survey. They don't have any money for it and they didn't discuss doing it in the Budget Narrative." So, just make sure everything you say you're going to do can be done and you have the finances to do it.

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Now, we'll move on to the next section and preparing and submitting an application.

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For preparing and submitting your application, here are the important dates. The deadline is September 20, 2012, at 4:30:00 p.m., Washington DC time. I say that because we often get applications that come in at 4:30:30 p.m. or 4:31:00 p.m. Because we have to be fair to everyone, if they come in late, they're called late and they're not submitted for peer review. They're returned to you. For this reason, we say to apply a few days early if you can.

There are several reasons to apply early. One is that on September 20th, the server will be very crowded and work very slowly. Also, if you submit early, you get an e-mail back from the organization (www.grants.gov) —which is where all applications are submitted—that says, "Your application was submitted successfully," or that says, "Your application was submitted unsuccessfully. You have to resubmit." That may be due to something you did wrong. You may have left some part of the application blank. It may take 1 or 2 days to get that e-mail. If you apply on September 20th, you'll get it too late to re-apply with the correct application. If you apply earlier in the week or the week before, you'll have plenty of time to make sure your application gets in.

The Letter of Intent (LOI) is requested, but not required. If you miss the LOI due date, you can still submit an application. It shouldn't take you too long to write a LOI. It just asks who's involved, how much is involved, and gives us a couple of paragraphs on what you're planning to do. That information is not seen by the peer review panel; it's superseded by your full application. You can completely change your mind in between the LOI submission and the application submission. What the LOI does is allow the Program Officer to see your idea and give you feedback saying, "You know, you're on track; this is great. Keep going and come back and talk to me as you develop," or, "This isn't the right place. You should be applying to another grant program that's better for you. Why don't you talk to that Program Officer? Don't spend your time applying here because you probably won't get funded." It also gives us a chance to give you some substantive editorial comments.

The application package is posted on Grants.gov on July 19, 2012. What that means is that you can't apply before July 19th. Your start dates can be any time between July 1, 2013 and September 1, 2013. You don't have to start on July 1st. If it's a bad time (e.g., everybody is on vacation), don't start then. On the other hand, if you need to get a jump on the work because everybody is going to go on vacation in August and you want to do some early planning, then certainly propose July 1st.

July 1st is also the latest time we notify people whether they've been funded. Normally, we'll notify you earlier; however, we have until July 1st to notify you.

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The RFA for 84.305H is on our funding website. You submit the LOI on this IES website. We have a special *Application Submission Guide* for people who haven't submitted on Grants.gov before. It'll take you through the steps and walk you through all the documents. It can save you a lot of headaches and ensure that your application is not rejected. It's on the same site as the RFA. You'll download the application package from Grants.gov, and then you upload and submit it through that same website. I am the Program Officer for this grant program, so please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding it. I will be responding to your LOIs as well.

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What happens after you submit? Well, remember at the beginning I showed you the schematic of IES and there was the Standards & Review Office coming out of the Director's Office? They take over at that point. They'll take your application and do a compliance screening—that's just looking for format requirements. Are you within the 25-page limit? If you submit a 30-page Project Narrative, they'll chop off the last 5 pages. Did you use a tiny font? Did you not format the margins as they asked you to? Again, it's a fairness issue; everybody has to have the same amount of space.

Then, they'll do a responsiveness screening. Are you in the right grant program? If you came in and proposed a partnership, but it didn't have a SEA or a LEA as a co-partner, you'd be rejected—you were not responsive. If you came in and didn't describe an analysis of administrative data, it would be rejected. You're not responsive because the application has to include that. So, that's why it's important to look at what must be done in your application.

Those applications found compliant and responsive are assigned to a review panel. Two to three reviewers will look at them; one will be a substantive person, and one a methodological person. If it's scored high enough, it will go to the full panel and be reviewed by them. As I mentioned, there will be many generalists to your topic; however, there will probably be an expert in anything you propose. If you propose secondary data analysis, or a survey, or interviews—there will be somebody there who does that for a living. You don't want to just toss in a paragraph saying, "And we'll do a student survey." You'll want to say, "We'll do a student survey," and spend a page explaining the survey you'll do, how you'll develop it, how you'll validate it, and how you'll analyze the results.

You'll get a score on each section of the application we discussed (the Significance, Research Plan, Personnel, and Resources) and you'll also get an overall score. Traditionally, we fund applications that receive overall ratings of "Outstanding," or "Excellent." That always depends on our budget. If you get a high enough score, we should be able to fund you.

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Everybody gets a notification by July 1st through e-mail. You'll receive copies of the reviewer comments. Many of our grants are actually awarded on resubmission. So, if you get a good score, you should not walk away. You should say, "Okay, let me look at the application. Let me look at the reviews. Let me talk to the Program Officer, and think about resubmitting the next year." Sometimes it'll take two revisions to get funded. So, if there's some promise seen by the peer reviewers in your grant application, don't give up.

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Finally, for more information, please go to our funding site. As I mentioned, I'm the Program Officer for this grant. I'm happy to talk with you about it.

Question: *"If I send you a draft, will you provide feedback?"*

Answer: *That depends. I will, if it comes in early enough that I have time to provide it. Of course, if it comes in 1-3 weeks before the deadline, I'll review them in the order that they come in and I give you feedback on them and talk with you about them, but it may not be in time to help you for this submission. The earlier they come in, the more likely I can give you feedback—this may mean you will want to send a couple of ideas in early and say, 'How do these sound?" using me as a sounding board and then come back later and say, 'Here's a preliminary draft. What do you think?" I'm certainly happy to give you responses on that.*

Question: *"Is there a set number of partnership grants that will be awarded?"*

Answer: *No. We don't have a limit or a dedicated amount of money here. We have one pot of money for all of our different grant programs and they're funded based on their scores. When the reviewers review, they're asked to review against absolute criteria—not relative criteria. So they're going to be giving you scores based on how good they think your grant is overall.*

As I mentioned, if the peer reviewers think you have submitted an outstanding or excellent application, we will try to fund you.

Question: *"What are the main points to include on the LOI?"*

Answer: *I'm going to let you go to the website. When you go in, there will be an LOI form. It will list everything. Again, as I mentioned, it's primarily who's involved, for how long, and what they are going to be doing. Then, the important part is providing a short abstract or synopsis about the work you are proposing to do, which I can respond to. It needs enough detail that I can respond and say, "This fits," or "This doesn't fit," but not so much detail that you have to spend a long time writing it.*

Question: *"Is this going to be an annual competition?"*

Answer: *We are going to see. This is the first time we're trying it. We want to see how well it works. If we get a good set of applications that the peer reviewers are excited about, we may continue it annually. We have in the past started and stopped other competitions that didn't work out well. For example, we started the Evaluation of State and Local Education Programs and Policies grant program in 2009. It led to some very interesting work that's going on. So, the decision was made to keep that grant program going. Right now I'm thinking, "Ah, I wonder if I could throw this back on you. You submit some very good applications, get funded, and do some good work and the incentive for us to continue the program will be there."*

There are no more questions so I'll end the webinar. Enjoy your Memorial Day weekend. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

This concludes today's webinar, Overview of the Funding Opportunities for Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research, 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.