IES Webinar - Overview of Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research

Allen Ruby:
My name is Allen Ruby and I'm here to talk to you today about the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research topic. For shorthand, I'll call it Research Partnerships. This is the first topic under the RFA for Partnerships and Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice and Policy grant program, CFDA number 84.305H.

An overview of today's webinar – we'll take a quick look at IES and its mission and then we'll go straight into the Research Partnerships topic, talk about the purpose of the partnerships, the requirements, the project narrative, some other important sections of the application, and then little bit on preparing and submitting your application.

Please do send your questions at any time. I may group them or try to place where they are most relevant.

The mission of IES is to describe the condition and progress of education in the United States, to find education practices that improve academic achievement and access, and to evaluate the effectiveness of federal and other education programs. IES is led by a Director, currently John Easton, who is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, and is advised by a Board, also appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. IES has four centers underneath the director: the National Center for Education Evaluation, which does large scale contracted out evaluation studies and oversees the regional education labs and the What Works Clearing house; the National Center for Education Statistics, you may have worked with some of the data and the surveys they do, and they also give grants to states for the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. And there are the two grant-making centers: the National Center for Education Research, where I'm located, and the National Center for Special Education Research. The grant programs are housed and the program officers like myself are housed in these two Centers. We can work with you and provide technical assistance on writing your grant. Under the office of the director is also the Standards and Review office which is responsible for the actual peer review process your grant application undergoes. So the program officers have no role in the peer review process including choosing the peer reviewers and making the final decisions which allows us more freedom and opportunity to work with you on your grant. So do feel free to contact us, to discuss application or specific substantive issues regarding your application.

Overall, the grant programs that are housed in those two Centers seek to answer four questions. What works to improve student education outcomes in order to disseminate what is found to work, be they practices, programs, or policy. Which ones that are being used now that do not work, and that's so we can stop disseminating them. The third question is what works for whom and where because we know not every intervention works for everyone or in every type of situation, so we really want to know how to target interventions to improve student outcomes. And finally, to better understand why something works, in order to build other more effective interventions.

Partnerships have become of growing importance to IES. This is reflected in the Institute's priorities set by the Director and approved by the Board. Partnerships between researchers and practitioners (often education agencies, be they state or local) are seen as ways to help focus research on issues of greatest concern to policy makers and practitioners, and as a way to help researchers communicate their findings in useful ways. What distinguishes research done in partnerships is that policy makers and practitioners have a strong role in the research from its beginning throughout the research. It's not something that comes only at the end of the project during the dissemination of the findings.

For partnerships in the grant programs, the expectation is that the proposed research will be collaborative from its start, that the partners together will develop the research questions, agree on a research design and how it can be implemented, discuss results as they come in, and therefore, how the direction of the research might change, consider the practice and policy implications of the findings, disseminate the results, and plan for future research.

These types of partnerships have always been possible under the Institute's grant programs. Under the two primary grant programs, the Education Research Grants Program and the Special Education Research Grants Program (known as 305A and 324A), there have always been partnerships and they have always been possible. In 2009, IES first started requiring partnerships under a new grant program, the Evaluation of State and Local Education Programs and Policies, and then in 2012, the Institute started this program I'm going to talk about today--the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research. Last year, these two programs were grouped together under one RFA that we call the Partnerships and Collaboration RFA. Today we're going to talk about its first topic, Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships. We'll be holding a webinar on Monday, June 9th, from 2:00 to 3:30 to cover the other two topics that require partnerships.

Now, let's focus on the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research topic. This topic provides an opportunity to both develop the partnership through joint initial research and to develop a longer-term research plan. Its intention is to foster longer-term partnerships that continue on after this initial grant. Very broadly, what these grants are to do is to identify an education issue that has important implications for improving student achievement and is also of high priority for the education agency. Next, they are to carry out some initial research regarding that issue, which will lead to developing a plan for future research, and that future research may be of very different types. It may be a deeper examination of the type of research initially done, it may be the actual development of a new program or policy to address the issue, or it may be for an evaluation of an existing program or policy. The partnerships are also to increase the agency's capacity to take part in research and to use research results. This capacity building, which will take place partly through the joint research being done, can target activities that the partners agree will build the agency's capacity. It may be specific types of training or dissemination that the agency learns how to do. There's no intention here that the education agency will become an independent research organization. The idea here is that it'll become more capable of taking part in research and using the results of research.

Sometimes we get questions about what should the balance be between the partnership side of this grant and the research work being done. It's important to remember that IES is a science

agency so the research is considered of equal importance to the partnership development, and that research should be of value both to the education agency and to building knowledge in the field of education sciences. Now, this balance may vary a bit. While I mentioned equal importance, but it may vary a bit. For example, for a very new partnership, you may have to give more attention to the partnership building; or for an existing partnership, you may give less attention and more attention to the research. But again, we're trying to keep it so that one does not overwhelm the other.

We list in the RFA a number of expected products that would come out of a grant of this type and these are the types of things you would report on in your annual reports and your final report: description of the partnership, the education issue you are researching, what did you find from the initial research, how will the partnership will carry on research in the future, how is the capacity built in the education agency, ideas for how the partnership could be maintained over the longer term, and lessons learned from developing your partnership that may be useful for others who want to develop similar partnerships. Regarding the latter, an underlying purpose of this research is not only to do the research and build your partnership, but also to figure out models for building partnerships.

Let's go into the major requirements of these grants. First, for IES grants, the research we support must address education outcomes of students. And we can group these outcomes in two categories: academic outcomes and social and behavioral competencies that support student success including academic outcomes.

Your work is to focus on a specific student population from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary and adult education. Therefore this grant topic does not address children younger than pre-K students. You can focus on typically developing students or you can focus on students with disabilities or who are at risk of disability. If anyone is interested in looking at students at risk for disabilities, please look at the website listed on the slide because there are specific requirements for identifying those students.

So let's take a look at these student outcomes that you'll need to include in your work. We call these the ultimate outcomes of interest. If you're working with prekindergarten students, you'll be looking at outcomes that measure school readiness, for example, pre-reading, language, vocabulary, early math, and science knowledge, and the supporting social and behavioral competencies.

If you're working with students from kindergarten up to grade 12, there are two categories of student academic outcomes. There are learning outcomes in the major academic subjects (reading, writing, math, and science) such as test scores and grades and there's also progress through the education system, such as course or grade completion, high school graduation or dropout. You can look at any of these alone or in combination as well as examining the social skills and attitudes and behaviors that support these outcomes and their progress.

For students in post-secondary education, (baccalaureate and sub-baccalaureate – certificate, two or four-year programs) the outcomes are access to or enrollment in, persistence and progress through and completion of these types of program. For students who are in developmental

education program, you can also look at the achievement outcomes in the major subjects: reading, writing, English language proficiency, and mathematics. We also support work on gateway math and science courses and introductory English composition courses in postsecondary education.

For adult education, (students over 16 years old who are outside the K to 12 system engaged in adult basic education, adult secondary, adult English as a second language, and GED preparation) outcomes includes both achievement in reading, writing, English language proficiency, and mathematics, as well access to and progress through the adult education programs.

These are the student outcomes that are to be included in your research. For any research you propose, you must connect your work to some of these types of student outcomes.

A second major requirement is that you must apply as a partnership. That partnership may be brand new or it may be of moderate or longstanding length, but you must have a PI from a research institution applying with a PI from a state or a local education agency. The PI from the research institution must have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research and should have expertise in the education issue you're looking at. And the PI from the state or local education agency must have some decision-making authority for the issue within their agency.

This year we are asking for a joint letter of agreement from the two partners. That means the partner organizations should write one letter signed by the two PIs laying out the type of work that they want to do and their willingness to take on their respective responsibilities to do this research. In a sense, it's like a memorandum of understanding being signed by both parties saying they're jointly willing to do this work.

When you actually write your application, there can only be one principal investigator-project director. The other person will be called the Co-PI. IES doesn't take a position on who should be the PI-project director. That's up to the team to decide thought IES recommends that the person chosen has project management experience for a grant this size.

IES uses a broad definition of what a research institution is. There's no specific type of organization. You have to show that you have the ability to do the type of research you're proposing. You could be from a university, a college, a private organization (non-profit or for-profit), as long as you can show that you and your organization have the ability to do this work.

A few questions have come in. The first one is -- does a grant have to encompass from pre-K all the way up to adult education, or can you look at a grade span? The answer is you can pick your grade span. If you wanted to work with fifth grade, say to look at transition to middle school, you could focus solely on fifth grade. You can pick one grade or a specific grade span, say middle school. You can pick a span that crosses grade ranges, for example you might look at the transition from high school to college (e.g., 11th grade through college). So it's up to you to decide but it must be somewhere within the range given from pre-K through postsecondary/adult education.

There's a question on what if we worked with a consortium of districts? Do they each need a PI or just one from a primary district? The answer is up to your team. If you're working, let's say, with five different districts, they'd be more involved in the work if there were one PI from the research institute and a PI from each of the districts. On the other hand, you might say that's just too unwieldy so we'll have a PI from one of the districts and representatives from the other four districts with other roles on the project. What you don't want to do is have one PI from one of the districts and nobody from the other four districts because then it is no longer clear if those four districts are involved. If research is going to occur in schools in a district, you'll need somebody on the project team to make sure it can happen. So it depends upon how much work is being done in the other districts. We often do see grants where there may be one or two districts heavily involved and then four or five other districts participate through an observer status because they're very interested to see how the work progresses but they either didn't want to get involved at first or they just don't have the capacity to get involved but they do want to keep their eyes on it, and in some sense. Together they may form an advisory panel. So the project may come and present to them, they give feedback, and that way, they're updated on the work but they can also have some involvement in the project.

A third questions ask whether the social and behavioral skills outcomes need to be linked to the academic outcome? There is no requirement to make this link but the peer reviewers usually see a project focusing on social and behavioral skills also includes academic outcomes and makes a theoretical link between them.

A fourth question asks if the peer review process uses the same rubric as the Education Research Grants Program? The rubric is not quite the same because the Research Partnership application includes a section on the Partnership that receives a separate score and this is section does not exist in the Education Research Grants Program.

One additional question asks whether you can have two research institutions in the project? The answer is yes and we'll talk more about that shortly.

Now let's address the education agency partner. There are many types of state education agencies e.g., agencies, departments, boards, commissions. These include education agencies in U.S. territories as well as tribal education agencies. Sometimes, they oversee the whole education process and sometimes, they're very focused on a specific area. For example, you might have a separate state agency for early learning or adult education. Other agencies may have some role in a student's education, e.g., juvenile justice or social service systems. If the state education agency (or district education agency) still has responsibility for the students' education, that agency should be included as a partner.

Local education agencies are primarily public school districts, and you more than one can be a partner. Also, a partnership may include both an SEA and LEAs. Some states have community college districts and these qualify as LEAs. The status of state or district postsecondary systems as an education agency can vary. Public postsecondary education systems may be overseen by state higher education boards or commissions and these would need to be included in the partnership. Some cities have similar agencies to oversee their public postsecondary system while others do not. If a district that has such an oversight agency or board, they will need to

come in as one of your partners. If you're in a city or a state that does not have such a board or authority, and usually that's only in certain cities where the city college system is somewhat independent, the city college system can be the agency partner. However, a postsecondary education system cannot study itself. So a university system cannot propose being the education agency with a organization that is part of the university system (such as a campus, department, or research institution or office) acting as the research agency partner. For example, if the California State University system wanted to study itself, they would have to get someone from outside of the system to be the research institution.

Non-public organizations that oversee and administer schools such as education management organizations or charter management organizations cannot serve alone as the education agency. A partnership would also have to include the state or the district agency that oversees these types of schools as a partner as well as the charter organization or the education management organization who would be another partner in the work.

You may want to bring on additional partners if they're going to increase the quality of the research. You will want to justify these additional partners, because more partners means more complexity and further division of resources, so you want to show it's a good tradeoff.

You may want to bring on an additional state or local education agency if, for example, they share some similarity. They may be geographically contiguous or they may share interest in the education issue you're addressing so you'll be able to increase the area where you can do the research and you'll be able to increase the reach of the research. This may be very important if you're working with small districts. For example, if your partnership included a small rural district, the peer reviewers might say, "okay, it's an interesting topic but they're working in such a small district. What kind of impact would we see from this work?" But if you came in and said "I'm working with six small rural districts plus they're similar to a much larger population of rural districts, so through this work, we're addressing a larger number of districts", that may make the work more significant.

You may want to bring in non-education state and local agencies as partners. We mentioned juvenile justice and social service agencies when addressing students in the juvenile justice system or foster children. If there are other agencies involved with the students you're looking at or the issue you're looking you may want them to take part in the research. They can't be the primary agency partner, but they can be a supporting agency partner.

You may want to bring in more than one research institution and this is very common if you want to pull certain types of expertise into the project. Project often draw upon personnel from different research institutions because they bring different expertise to the project..

You may want to include other non-research organizations such as issue-oriented or stakeholder groups. Such groups may help increase family or teacher involvement, they may have local knowledge, and they may be helpful in planning and implementing future research.

One kind of partnership I wouldn't recommend is when there's a pre-existing connection between a research institution and a multiple number of districts and the connection is primarily

through the research institution (i.e., there are few connections between the districts and they only weakly share interest in the same education issues). I would call that a convenience partnership because the research institution is already working with these districts but there is not a strong justification for looking at the same education issue in all the districts.

As you consider your research idea, ask if this is really the right grant program for you? I've had a number of calls where people say, "Well, I'm doing this work in partnership so I should apply to this topic". First, think about what type of research you want to do. If you're ready to work supported under the Education Research Grants Program (84.305A), that's where you should apply. So if you don't need any initial work but are ready to carry out exploratory research, develop an intervention or a new measure, or evaluate an intervention and you want to do that in partnership, then you should be looking at the Education Research Grants Program or the Special Education Research Grants Program. This grant topic supports initial work that leads to these types of work in the future. If you've already done that kind of preliminary work, you shouldn't apply to this grant topic.

Let's discuss the Project Narrative. This is the main body of your grant application. This is what the peer reviewers focus on. It's a maximum of 25 pages. It was revised this year to add a new section on Partnership. This revisions was done in response to applicant who wanted to be able to write about their partnership in one place and to peer reviewers who wanted to be able to give a rating to the quality of the partnership as proposed in the application.

The Request for Applications' discussion of the Project Narrative was also revised. The Project Narrative is now composed of five sections each of these sections is now discussed as to Requirements and Recommendations. The requirements are the minimum you need to cover in order to be considered responsive to the Request for Applications and to be accepted for peer review. After the requirements there are the recommendations, and these are the issues the peer reviewers use to rate the quality of your application. So we recommend that you make sure you meet all the requirements so you are accepted for peer review, and that you address the recommendations so that the peer reviewers give you a good score.

Let's start with the Significance section. Here you're to argue why your proposed work is important. A first step is to describe the education issue you're going to address and how it is linked to the student outcomes that we described earlier. And here, you may want to provide a theory of change - how does this education issue link to student outcome. In addition, you should discuss why this specific issue is of importance to this specific state or local education agency and what is the agency hoping to learn from the work you're going to propose. You'll address what your research aims are, what are you trying to learn – giving a an overview of the research but not the specific details of your research because that will go under the third section of the research plan.

You also want to describe the education system you'll be working in (the education agency partner) and what level you'll be working at (e.g., district, school, classroom, student). In addition, you should describe any ongoing work the agency is also doing in this area.

Finally, you will want to discuss whether the education issue is important to others. Will your work have some generalizability? I mentioned before, for example, in order to make work done on a small number of rural districts more significant, you may want to describe how it applies to a much larger number of districts.

Also, you will want to discuss whether the issue and your work can contribute to the field of education research. This issue is of secondary importance to the significance, but it will be considered by the peer reviewers.

Let's move on to the second section, the new Partnership section. You want to describe the partners. Who is the research institution? Who is the education agency? Are there other members of the partnership? What you're describing here is who is in the partnership and why are they in the partnership? What are their common interests? What are their complementary abilities? How will they benefit from the work and how will they contribute to the work? How will you structure the management so the partnership stays on track? And you also want to note, does the education agency have any other research partnerships, and show that this one that you're proposing doesn't overlap with that one, so we're not funding two different partnerships to do the same work.

You want to talk a bit about the stage of the partnership. Is it a brand new one? Are you in early stages? Is it a fairly mature one? And there are tradeoffs to applying from each stage so you're going to have to address different issues when you're talking about this. If you're a mature partnership, the review panel will have more confidence that you can carry out the work proposed. But on the other hand, they may question, why you need a partnership grant? Why can't you just get another grant? Mature partnerships have gotten grants before. Sometimes they'll say, "We're starting a whole new line of work. This partnership has never addressed this type of work before, so in a sense it's a new partnership for this type of work, built on an existing partnership."

For early partnerships, there may be less confidence that the two groups will work well together and carry out the work, but there also may be a greater need for such a partnership, especially for those education agencies that don't have good links to research institutions. But even for an early partnership, there has to be some evidence that the partners share an interest and can work together. And so as noted on the slide, if you should show some history of working together, even if slight. There must have been some conversations, some initial working together to even broach the idea of creating a partnership and agreeing to it, so you can talk a little bit about how that occurred.

Ongoing partnerships are much stronger if the same people are involved. An application may note that a university has worked with this district for 15 years, but as you read closely, you'll see that the the PI and the co-PI, have never worked together. So it may be a mature institutional partnership but a new personnel one. It may be helpful to be clear on this and discuss whether the personnel have worked together or intend to work together. That's important to know.

You'll want to discuss how you expect the partnership will develop. IES assumes that by doing the research together, the partnership will naturally develop. People will be working together;

discussing issues, and working out details of the research, and considering research results. If they succeed in doing this, the partnership would be expected to grow. You may also want to propose some activities and processes that will contribute to both the research and the capacity building. In order to facilitate the working together, you should describe the decision making process. How will next steps in the research be decided upon? How will you agree on how the results should be disseminated? What type of capacity building will be done and who will decide what is done? How will the decisions be made on future research?

What is the goal of the agency's capacity building to participate in and use the research? This capacity building will depend upon the initial capacity of the agency and its own interest. For an agency that has never been involved in research before, there's going to be a lot of learning of how research is done, and how the results are used and generalized through the initial research done in this project. For an agency that has a capacity to do some research already, it may be interested in learning specific skills that its personnel can apply.

Thirdly, you'll want to talk about how you monitor the success of the partnership. And the success at the time goes during the project, so, maintaining the project, completing the research, developing a plan for future research, but also thinking about successes after the project. Can the partnership continue and can the agency use what it's learned to participate in future research. And we also encourage projects to propose any other additional indicators of partnership success that they would find important to the partnership as well. This is part of this process of trying to identify indicators that other partnerships may want to use as they work in these areas.

Moving on to the Research Plan: you'll want to lay out the plan for carrying out the initial research. If you're looking at an education issue hasn't been examined in your district, you may only be able to say "we're going to start by looking at this in this way and then depending on what we find there, we will go this way, or that way in our research." Or, you may already have some very specific practices that you want to focus on in a way of looking at them and you may have a detailed research plan. For example, one issue that has come up in many districts is how to work with the children from immigrant families. There are some districts that, for the first time, are facing a large influx of immigrant families and their children are going to school, and this may be a brand new issue for them. They may want to start with gathering some basic information, e.g., "We need to figure out how many such children are in our schools. How are individual schools and teachers actually responding to them? How involved are the parents of these children? And how are the students performing?" This would be preliminary work and may lead to such future work regarding developing specific approaches or interventions for these students, their teachers, and/or parents?
On the other hand, the district may have a long-standing history of serving children of immigrants and they may have many targeted programs but now want to consider the value of the programs. And before they do a full-scale evaluation, they may say, "We really have to do some preliminary work. We need to find out how many programs are there. We have that on paper, but in practice we really don't know what's going on in the schools. Are people implementing the same way across the schools? How many different types -- are all the eligible students taking part in them or only some choosing to take part in them? So we want to do some very specific preliminary work and once we get that figured out, we can then move into a full-scale evaluation in the future."

Earlier, I mentioned checking if this is the right grant topic for you. One way to do this check, is to consider whether/how your initial research is preparing you for doing some type of future research.

The initial research is often exploratory and descriptive -- it can be primary data collection and analysis, it may be secondary data analysis, or a combination of both of them depending on what you need to do and what's available. You should clearly describe though, your research objectives and your research questions, and sort of the research design you'll be using to examine this education issue. So you'll want to lay out what the population you're looking at; what the sample of this population you think you'll be examining in your research; what level is your analysis at; if you're going to collect data, how will you collect it; if you're going to use secondary data, describe that secondary data and its strengths or weaknesses (e.g., missing data); what type of measures you'll be using and a part of these will include the student outcomes; and what your analysis plan will look like.

Your work can be solely quantitative. I would argue that some sort of mixed methods would be a stronger approach so that the quantitative and qualitative work inform one another but it is not required. If you're most interested in focusing solely on qualitative work, I would argue that your qualitative work should be able to be quantified to some extent and analyzed to some extent because if not, your qualitative work is probably not looking at a large enough sample to be considered representative across the education agency. If not, it is difficult to argue that your initial research can be used to decide on future research.

A question has come in: "Is it okay for certain measurement systems to be developed within the context of the partnership?" And I would say, if you are proposing to develop and validate a measure or measurement system, you should apply to the Measurement goal of the Education Research Grant Program (84.305A). On the other hand, if you argue that you need to do some preliminary work to prepare an application for the Measurement goal and that the measurement system is a high priority to the education agency, then Research Partnerships is an appropriate topic to apply to.

Back to the Research Plan: you want to discuss how the research will contribute to the understanding of the education issue and provide useful information to the education agency's decision-making. There's a little bit of a paradox here I want you to be aware of it. On one hand, this grant is for doing initial research. Nobody is expecting you to come out with a conclusive answer that an education agency can confidently use to change policy. On the other hand, peer reviewers always want to know of what value is this work to the education agency? So you're kind of walking in between that line saying, "We're doing initial research, but to some extent, the agency can use the results of its research in its work in this way…." This point can also be linked to what type of research the initial research may lead to: exploratory, development, or evaluation research.

Following up on the future work, you'll want to discuss how the partnership will decide whether the results lend themselves to the partnership continuing and planning future research. How during this project, will you start thinking about that future research? It may be helpful to think

backwards: what is the future research to accomplish and what do we need to do in this project to prepare for that future work. For example, there has been some work on foster children being moved often which leads them to attending multiple schools and this may be detrimental to their education. So a long-term goal is to work out a program or policy for the education agency and the social service agency to keep foster kids in the same school. So looking at this from a backward planning approach, you might consider "what do I need to do to know now to prepare for developing such a program or policy. I may be in a district that has a large number of foster kids, but I may want to find out whether they are equally distributed among the schools; is a subgroup doing most of the moving and, if so, why?; are certain schools moving more students than others?; what age group or grade group am I talking who moves the most or seems to be the most affected?" These are the type of questions you may want to answer first before jumping into the development of a new program or policy for these students. Also, the time to answer these questions may give you time to develop the collaboration among all the partners that will be needed to develop and implement a new program/policy.

We've covered the three substantive sections of the Project Narrative. If you have any questions on them, please send them in. I'll move on to the other two sections -- Personnel and Resources. While they are often given less weight by the reviewers, if the reviewers don't think you have the right Personnel or the Resources for the project, you're unlikely to get a high rating. You must identify all key personnel on the project. Key personnel include the PI and the co-PI and any other personnel you feel are required for the success of the project. We mentioned earlier that the PI from the research institution should have some expertise, either in the issue or the method being used in the research and the PI from the education agency must have some decision-making authority regarding the education agency being studied.

One way to think about the Personnel section is to say to yourself, "Let me list out all the work I'm promising to do in this project, then let me list out the person who's going to do each piece of this work, then let me list out each person's expertise and experience to do that type of work, then let me list out how much time they have on this project to show that they have enough time to do that work." As a result the Personnel section lists each person, their work on the project, their expertise and experience to do that work, and their time available to do that work.

Often times we'll see Personnel sections with huge paragraphs for each person that includes all their work and grants much of which is not relevant to this project. That material should be provided in CV section but it is less useful in the Personnel section and much longer than saying something like this person is an expert in survey methodology, he'll be responsible for the teacher's survey we're doing looking at instruction of students from immigrant parents; he's served on two other grants in which he was responsible for surveys, he's written 16 papers using survey methodology, and he's on the project for 10 percent time which is enough time to oversee the implementation and analysis." The reviewers can then check the person's CV to see that this information is correct.

Because these are partnership grants, it's helpful to note if people on the team have worked in a partnership before, and obviously the success of those partnerships. You'll also want to note that the PI has experience managing a grant of this size and this type before if they've had, or smaller grants perhaps, and this is the next step. Because these are small grants, it is possible that the

key personnel don't have a large percent of time on them. But it's important to have somebody, who is on the project and has time spread across the whole year to make sure the project keeps going and that progress is ongoing.

In regards to the Resources section, you'll want to talk about the institutional resources of the partners and how they'll contribute to building the partnership and carrying out the research. You'll want to talk about any resources that you don't have in hand but will have to purchase or acquire, and how you'll get them. We talked already about the Joint Letter of Agreement already.

If there are individual schools taking part, you may want to consider getting a letter from the schools. And this is the trade-off -- if you have a fair number of schools involved, it's a lot of work to get all the principals sign a Letter of Agreement. On the other hand, it increases the confidence of the peer reviewers to know that schools are willing to take part. A grant application may say, "This university is working with this district, and the district will make sure 10 schools take part." Many of the reviewers know that sometimes schools don't want to take part in research, that they have other priorities.

If secondary data is going to be analyzed, it's very important that the organization that's responsible and has that data writes a letter of permission. This is very important if you're using state longitudinal data. The reviewers know that in some states it's very difficult to get the data or it takes a long period of time to get the data. And since these are only two-year grants, there may be concerns that if the state or the district hasn't signed on to give the data at the start, or at least to give permission to consider giving the data at the start, the data will not obtained in time to do the work.

Finally, if there is going to be a large role for school staff (e.g., surveys, focus groups, classroom observations, teachers logs) you should discuss how their cooperation will be obtained. The reviewers are well aware of the problem of low response rates so you should discuss ways to increase participation, e.g., ways to communicate the study and its value to the staff, incentives, involving representative groups.

That completes the discussion of the Research Narrative. I want to mention a few of the other sections of the application partly because they've changed from last year. This year, Appendix A is limited solely to your responses to any previous reviewer comments on the application if it was submitted previously. You have up to three pages to respond if you're resubmitting an application.
Appendix B is a maximum of 15 pages and it is for figures, charts, or tables that supplement your Project Narrative. If you have a large amount of data and it takes up too much room in the Research Narrative, put it in a table in Appendix B. If your proposing to give a survey or do classroom observation, putting the survey (or representative items) or the observation protocol in Appendix B will give reviewers confidence that you are ready to carry out the work. Then make a reference to it in the Project Narrative so that reviewers know to look in Appendix B for it. Project timelines are also helpful in Appendix B. But do not include any narrative text in Appendix B – that should be put in the Project Narrative. Narrative text may be removed before the review.

Appendix C is for examples of a practice, interventions, assessment, program or policy that you are studying. For example, if your proposed project is to prepare for an evaluation of a new curriculum adopted by a district, you might include examples of that curriculum. Contrasting Appendices A and B, Appendix A includes measures and instruments you will use to carry out the research (e.g., an observation tool to check how teachers are using the new curriculum) while Appendix B materials that are the subject of your research (e.g., a typical reading from the new curriculum).

Appendix D is for your Letters of Agreement: the Joint Letter from the key partners, other letters from any other organizations in the partnership, letters from schools, organizations holding data, or any consultants you're including. And the letter should not just be form letters. The letters should be very clear about the responsibilities of the partner and what they will contribute to the project.

You will fill out a Budget and a Budget Narrative. The maximum award is $400,000 and the maximum length is two years. You don't need to ask for the full $400,000 if your work doesn't require it. The reviewers do make comments on the budget and they will comment if they think a budget is excessive. On the other hand, the reviewers are fine with the maximum award if the work is commensurate, so don't under-bid and take a chance of running out of money before completing what you promised to complete. The budget narrative describes how the funds will be used and the more detailed it is the easier it is to use.

Here are the key dates. The application deadline is August 7th at 4:30:00 pm Washington, DC time. We say zero seconds because it really is zero seconds. If you come in at 4:30:01 you'll be considered late and your application will not be reviewed. The server gets very busy the days around the deadline, so we would recommend you apply a few days before. Also, if a mistake is found in your application, you may get an email telling you a mistake was found and you have to reapply. So if you can apply early, you'll have time to reapply if that occurs.

The Letters of Intent are due today at 4:30. Program officers will respond to them give you some initial comments for example, "I think there's a better grant program/topic for you to apply to." and offer you an opportunity to discuss your idea. The Standards and Review Office uses the Letters to get an idea of how many applications are coming in, and what types are coming in, so they can start planning on the number and type of reviewers that will be needed. The reviewers never see your Letter of Intent, they only see your application. So you can make major changes between your Letter and your application including changing or adding partners.

If you weren't able to submit a Letter of Intent, you can write up something similar and email it to me and then I will give you my response to your research idea.

In regards to your start date: you can start any time between July 1 and September 1, 2015. So we ask you think about whether folks will be around during summer to start work or, conversely, whether everyone will need to start working in July to prepare for work when school starts up.

This slide lists the websites for the Request for Applications, submitting the Letter of Intent, the Application Package (the forms you have to fill out as part of your application). For the Application Package, when you go to www.grants.gov don't search by 84.305h -- you won't find it with the h on there. You have to search by the 84.305.

Your application will go through several steps. First, there's the compliance screening to check if you meet the format requirements (e.g., 25 page maximum for the Project Narrative, font size, correct use of Appendices). The Standards and Review Office also does a responsiveness screening to make sure you applied to the correct grant competition and topic.

After an application is found compliant and responsive, it is assigned to a review panel. In the past, there's been a separate review panel just for this topic - that may or may not be continued in the future. The application will be reviewed by two or three reviewers -- one of whom should be knowledgeable about your education issue and one should be knowledgeable about the methods you propose to use. The applications found most competitive from this initial review will then be reviewed by the full panel.

So when you're writing the application, you are writing both for experts in your area and for generalists to it. However, there should be an expert in the methods you propose to used on your review panel. So, you have to write in a way that all can understand.

The panel will give a score on each of the five sections of the Project Narrative: from Significance through the Resources section. They will also give an overall score. You'll receive an email that the following information is available in your account on the Applicant Notification System: the status of your award (did you receive the award or not) and the reviewer comments. We don't formally announce the winners until July 1, 2015. Often you'll be notified before the official announcement but I can't give you a time that that will occur -- that depends on the actual process that has to be gone through for the review process. So it may be a month or up to two months beforehand.

Many of our rewards are for resubmissions, so if you get good comments back and you think you can address them, you should talk to the program officer and talk about revisions..

So that concludes the formal presentation. If there are any other questions, please send them along right now. If you prefer, you can also email me directly. I'll hold on here a few minutes longer for questions. I appreciate you staying for the talk today, and we look forward to seeing your applications and discussing with you your research ideas. Thank you.

We are getting some questions.
Here's one on whether Letters of Intent have to specify which of the three topics will be pursued. Yes, they do. When you fill out the Letter of Intent form it will have a space for.

A question as to "Can we submit a proposal without a Letter of Intent?" The answer is yes. You don't have to submit a Letter of Intent to submit a proposal. I would suggest that you send me an email with your research idea so that I can comment on it and discuss with you but that is not required.

Someone else has asked are there any priorities given to particular topics within the general topics outline-based grade levels? The answer is no, there are no priorities. This is really a field-initiated research program. It's up to you to argue why your proposed work is significant.

Someone has asked, "Can you send the program officer emails on an idea after today's deadline?" And yes, you can send me ideas throughout the summer. Of course as we approach the August deadline, the more difficult it will be to put a strong application together, but if there isn't time, you can think about it for next year's competition.

Someone has asked, "Can partnerships include for-profit businesses?" and the answer is yes. You just need to justify their role – e.g., if they are the research institution then describe their capacity to do the research proposed. Some for-profits are not familiar with grants – it is important for them to know that they cannot charge a fee under a grant (fees are often allowable under contracts). They would have to accept grant reimbursement and use grant accounting.

Someone asked, "Is the researcher normally the grantee and the education agency the sub-grantee or are they both grantees?" The answer is that one partner has to be the grantee (the grant goes directly to that partner) and the funds can then go to the other partner(s) through sub-awards. IES does not take a position on which partner should be the grantee but suggests that the institution better positioned manage a grant should be considered. Some education agencies have experience managing research grants while others don't want to be involved in the management of a grant or don't have experience managing one.

Another question is can you include overhead for the university? Universities that receive federal grants have negotiated an indirect cost agreement with the government and can charge indirect costs. Research agencies that do not have such an agreement can work with the Department of Education's Indirect Cost Office.

Someone asks, "Can you include salaries for administrators from the education agency?" And yes, if, for example, if I'm having a superintendent as my PI or co-PI and she is on the project for 10 percent, the grant can cover her 10 percent time for salary and benefits costs. In addition, personnel can be hired and placed at the education agency to do project work (they may be hired by the education agency or the research institution), e.g., a research assistant or a data manager. Funds can be used for salaries of personnel at any of the partners if they're working on the project.

Another question -- if you have a previous partnership but this project is a new partnership between the two people from the institutions, is it a new partnership? I would answer that it depends. If the proposed partnership is taking advantage of past collaborative work on the issue or on structures set up by the partnership I might describe it as new personnel building off an existing institutional partnership. However, if the personnel are knew to each other and the education issue is new but some existing structures are being used, I might describe it as a new partnership based on an existing one. This gets more complicated for large institutions – if the same divisions within them are working together, it sounds more like an existing partnership but

if different parts of each partner are working together for the first time, it sounds like a new partnership.

Someone asked, "Can grantees or sub-grantees purchase services from, or issue sub-contracts to other organizations for parts of the work?" The grantee will normally make a sub-award to the other partner(s). If needed, sub-grantees can purchase from other organizations. But in all cases, it is important to identify everyone who is receiving funding from the grant in your application. You don't want to come in and say, "We're going to give a sub-contract of $50,000 to do this type of work, but we haven't picked a sub-contractor yet." That doesn't allow the peer reviewers to review the sub-contractor. For example, the reviewers might say, "This application wants to sub-contract out a survey, but they won't tell me who will do the survey. So I can' tell you if that group is good or not. Since I can't comment on the likely quality of the survey implementation I don't feel comfortable about the survey itself so I will give a lower score." So it is important to make sure that everyone who is going to be involved is identified.

Somebody is asking about mayoral control: "Can a Deputy Mayor responsible for education be a partner?" This is another "it depends" answer. Some cities have set up offices to run specific areas of education systems. For example, a mayor may set up an office of pre-K education that has responsibility for providing the pre-K education. In this case, they are the only agency partner available to study pre-K education. On the other hand, if there's mayoral control but there still is a state or district education agency, then the major's office is not sufficient as the agency partner. The education agency is still implementing education as a separate organization and it needs to be the partner because it is doing the day-to-day work.

Somebody has asked, "If a PI has never managed a grant before but others on the team have, how will the peer reviewers respond to that?" And I would say, on one hand, since this is a small grant it may be easier for a researcher who has worked on grants before but never led one to be the PI, especially if they have a strong connection to the partner institution. On the other hand, if there is a complicated partnership with multiple partners and personnel who have never worked together it may be better to have PI with management experience. A new PI can also find ways to obtain management support, e.g., have an experienced Co-PI take on some management activities or have an advisory panel of more experienced persons who have led projects. If

Somebody asked, "What type of information is most compelling to reviewers to illustrate the importance of the topic beyond the LEA?" If you can show that the education issue is of high importance to other LEAs (those not involved in the partnership) and to the field of education research, that would make it more important. Also, if the issue has large implications for the education success of an underserved population, it may be seen as more important.

[end of transcript]