

NCSER Webinar
Special Education Research Grants Competition

Jackie Buckley:

Good afternoon and welcome to the webinar for the Special Education Research Grants Competition. My name is Jackie Buckley and I am joined by Amy Sussman and Katie Taylor. We are program officers in the National Center for Special Education Research.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about the background and organizational structure of IES as well as the background of our research grants competition. As shown on the organizational structure chart, there are four centers within IES. The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance is the center that does contacted evaluations and oversees the Regional Educational Labs (RELs), the What Works Clearinghouse, etc. Next is the National Center for Education Statistics, which is responsible for collecting and reporting data. The National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) are the two research centers within the Institute. Today's webinar is focused just on the National Center for Special Education Research, which you see highlighted in blue. When we do these webinars, we tend to have a combined webinar between NCER and NCSER because we do very similar tasks and we have very similar purposes. But this webinar, for reasons I'll explain in a couple of minutes, is focusing just on NCSER because we have some unique requirements this year for our Special Education Research Grants Program (CFDA # 84.324A).

As I said, the research centers serve very similar functions. In NCSER, our goal is to sponsor a rigorous and comprehensive program of special education research, and we fund research targeting infants and toddlers all the way through students in high school or students who are over 18 and are still receiving services through IDEA. NCER has a similar mission, but they fund research focused on preschool through adult education.

In general, the objectives of our research grant programs is to (1) identify what works to improve student education outcomes and disseminate this broadly, (2) find out what does not work so we can stop using it, (3) identify what works for whom and where so we can use it with the appropriate people in the appropriate places, and (4) understand why it does or does not work so we can improve education outcomes and encourage further innovation. These objectives drive the research that we do at both of the research centers.

As I mentioned before, we are focusing this webinar just on the Special Education Research Grants Program (CFDA # 84.324A). In 2017, this competition focuses specifically on teachers and other instructional personnel who are responsible for educating students with or at risk for a disability. We narrowed the focus this year to teachers and instructional personnel for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, NCSER will have a limited budget. Some of you may be familiar with our history, but back in 2013 we essentially ran out of money to be able to fund all the projects that were rated highly enough to be eligible for funding. Because of our restricted budget, we also did not hold a competition in 2014. For FY 2017, we do not want to be in a situation where we won't be able to fund everything that is rated within the funding range, so we chose to restrict the competition this year. Another reason for the special focus is that this was identified as a critical area for additional research. This past year, both NCER and NCSER

engaged in a variety of information gathering sessions from our key stakeholders to solicit feedback about the direction of our research programs and identify areas that we are covering well and areas we are not covering well. From researchers and practitioners we heard some very similar themes, one being the critical need for additional research on the knowledge and skills that teachers and other instructional personnel need to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Paraprofessional training and roles, for example, was mentioned as an important area for further research. Given the limited budget and this feedback on the critical need for additional research in this area, we chose to focus the FY 2017 Special Education Research Grants competition on teachers and other instructional personnel.

The Request for Applications (RFA) for this competition is very detailed as far as the requirements and recommendations within the various aspects of the research competition. In the RFA, we spell out the general requirements that you must meet to be deemed responsive to the RFA. When applications come in, they are screened for responsiveness, meaning they are reviewed to determine whether they meet the basic requirements described in the RFA. The first requirement pertains to the teacher and student sample. So who we are considering teachers and instructional personnel responsible for educating students with or at risk for disability? We have two different definitions, depending on whether you are focused on infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, or you're focused on teachers in the K-12 arena. For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, teachers and other instructional personnel can include early intervention specialists, teachers, school, or center-based staff, family childcare providers, related services personnel, or any other professionals or paraprofessionals who provide education or early intervention services for children with or at risk for a disability. Within K-12 education, we're really focused on teachers and instructional personnel such as paraprofessionals who provide instruction to students with or at risk for a disability. For the FY 2017 competition, we're not allowing research on related services personnel within the K-12 arena unless you can make an argument that they are instructional personnel. But the intent is to focus on teachers and other instructional personnel such as paraprofessionals.

As in past years, if you plan to focus on teachers of students at risk for a disability, you need to present an association between risk factors in your proposed student sample and the specific disabilities that the students are at risk for developing. We understand that students with disabilities are educated in a variety of settings, so teachers of students with disabilities may be teaching in an inclusive class, with students without disabilities, and that's fine. There can be students without disabilities in a class where you are focused on the teacher. However, if you are focused on a general education classroom environment and there are not identified students with a disability in that classroom, you would need to make the argument that there are students in that classroom who are at risk for a disability for a variety of reasons, be it academic or behavioral, in order to justify why you're focusing on that particular teacher or classroom. And, again, as I mentioned, across all topics; you may study teachers and instructional personnel who serve students with and without disabilities within the same classroom.

Another one of our general requirements is that you must assess teacher outcomes. We are most interested in outcomes related to knowledge and/or skills of those teachers and instructional personnel. Again, all of this information and additional detail is in our RFA. By knowledge, we mean things like factual information, concepts, theories, principles that teachers and instructional

personnel need to know and be aware of to become effective instructors for students with or at risk for disabilities. By skills, we mean the behaviors that the teachers engage in to facilitate student learning.

Again, teachers and instructional personnel must be the target of your study. We want to really make it clear that proposals to study only teachers' ability to implement a specific student-level intervention or curriculum where the purpose of the teacher is to deliver the intervention, but they themselves are not the target of the research study will be deemed non-responsive to the RFA and will not move forward in the review process. There are folks who have maybe developed a student-level intervention that happens to be implemented by teachers and they still want to try and study that under this new RFA, but unless there's a shift to focus solely on the teacher knowledge and skills that they need to be effective teachers of students with disabilities, it's not going to be responsive to the RFA.

And, as always, we have our requirement that you must focus on student outcomes. We are the Department of Education, and so we are very clearly interested in improving education outcomes for students. As in the past, even when your project is focused at the teacher-, policy-, or systems- level, you still have to assess student education outcomes. The student education outcomes should align with your theory of change, be directly or indirectly impacted by changes in teacher and/or instructional personnel knowledge and skills, and include both proximal and distal outcomes (when possible). We recognize that when you're intervening at the teacher level, the impact on student outcomes may be a more indirect outcome. You might not see that immediate impact, but you need to be able to convince reviewers that by intervening at the teacher level you would expect to impact change in student outcomes. We, as an Institute, are interested in teacher and/or other instructional personnel knowledge and skills that will actually impact and improve student outcomes.

The student outcomes we are interested in are the same as those we've had in the past, depending on the age or grade level that you're focused on. So if you're working with infants and toddlers, we're interested in developmental outcomes; if you're working with preschoolers, we are interested in developmental outcomes and school readiness; and for students in grades K-12, we are interested in achievement in academic content areas, social skills and behaviors that support education and post-school success, and functional outcomes (e.g., those that help students with disabilities transition to employment, to independent living, or post-secondary education).

Another requirement is that your work must be in authentic education settings. The authentic education setting varies by the teachers and/or other instructional personnel that you're targeting. For teachers and/or other instructional personnel of infants and toddlers, authentic education settings are not schools, but homes, childcare, or any natural setting for early intervention services. For preschoolers, it's similar; homes, childcare, preschool programs, or anywhere that students are receiving early childhood special education services. For teachers and/or other instructional personnel in K-12, settings can be typical schools, alternative schools, homes if the intervention is school-based, settings that deliver supplemental education services, settings that deliver direct student services, and Career and Technical Education Centers affiliated with schools or school systems. Again, these are all detailed in our RFA.

In 2017, even though we have restricted the focus to teachers and instructional personnel, we are maintaining our topic and goal structure. As in the past years, your application must be directed to 1 of 11 research topics and 1 of 5 research goals. Within each topic, you must focus on teachers and other instructional personnel.

This slide shows the research topics that we've had in the past and that we continue to have this year in our RFA. As you can see, we have a focus on academics (e.g., math/science, reading/writing) as well as behaviors that support learning (e.g., social/behavioral), and special education policies, finance, and systems, and so on. The autism spectrum disorders topic is the only disability-focused topic that we have. Within each of the other topics you can focus on any disability category, or argue that students might be at risk for a particular disability. The autism spectrum disorders is the only one that is disability-focused and it is because it requires a comprehensive focus on improving outcomes for students with autism, so you have to be able to address multiple domains of student outcomes within one study to be eligible for the autism spectrum disorders topic. Again, more detailed information about all of the different topics is provided in the RFA. The RFA also lists the program officers who are responsible for each research topic. If it's not clear where your research may fit, we, as program officers, can help you determine this.

In addition to choosing one research topic, you must also identify one research goal in your application. We fund five different types of research and that's what we call our research goals. We are going to walk through the different types of research that we fund.

The Exploration goal supports research that explores associations between malleable factors and teacher or instructional personnel outcomes and corresponding student outcomes and/or identifies factors and conditions that may mediate or moderate the relationships. An exploration goal helps you figure out areas to target in an intervention. The exploration goal is where you'll see secondary data analysis projects. I mentioned IES' National Center for Education Statistics at the beginning of the webinar. They house a huge amount of data that's available to researchers to explore, and so we do fund some exploration grants that use NCES datasets to explore these relationships (however, you don't have to use a large national dataset for secondary data analysis). You can also do primary data collection and analysis. We also see meta-analyses under the exploration goal, or any combination of these things that I discussed. The intent really is to explore; it is not to determine a causal relationship; it is to try to figure out what malleable factors are linked to improved students outcomes, and therefore may become the target of intervention. After an exploration goal, our intent is that you would come back with either a development grant to develop an intervention, or perhaps a measurement grant to develop better assessments for example. One thing to note with our exploration goal is that these projects can focus on pre-service teachers. Both of our research centers focus primarily on in-service teachers because we have that requirement to look at student outcomes in all of the projects. It's a much more difficult to look at student outcomes if you are examining pre-service teacher intervention or pre-service programs, and so we have not traditionally allowed work on pre-service teachers. However, in the past couple of years and for the 2017 RFA, we are allowing work on pre-service teachers, just in the Goal one exploration grants, to be able to explore skills and knowledge that pre-service teachers may need to be better prepared to address the needs of students with disabilities.

And the next type of project that we fund is our Development and Innovation goal, and I would say the majority of the work that we fund is in this area. The purpose of these projects is to develop a new intervention or improve an existing intervention. The intent is that you spend the majority of time in the development process and collecting data on the usability and feasibility and fidelity of implementation in authentic education settings. And we expect you to collect pilot data at the end of the development process to look at the potential impact of the intervention on teacher and student outcomes. The way that we talk about intervention and define intervention at IES is fairly broad. Interventions include a wide range of professional development activities, maybe technology tools, practices, programs, policies, et cetera, that would improve or that you suspect would improve teacher and instructional personnel outcomes and subsequent student education outcomes.

I mentioned the theory of change in a previous slide. Essentially, you should show who you are targeting, what your intervention components are, and what teacher and student outcomes you expect to be impacted by those components. You should be able to argue why those intervention components are important and how those components will potentially improve teacher outcomes. And if you improve those teacher level outcomes, are you also seeing improvement in student education outcomes? This is the type of information that needs to be contained in your application to argue for why your particular intervention is better than existing practice. In other words, you need to describe what it is about your particular intervention that will improve teacher outcomes and, importantly, be linked to improvements in student outcomes.

The next goal, Efficacy and Replication, is where we support those who rigorously test fully developed interventions under routine or ideal conditions. Very often the researchers are highly involved in the intervention in the efficacy grant, making sure that it's implemented as it's intended. Under this goal, you can also propose a replication study to generate additional evidence for an efficacious intervention by replicating previous efficacy studies or varying the original conditions. For example, you might propose this type of study if there is one study showing that the intervention improved outcomes for teachers, and now you want to try testing it in a different setting (e.g., rural versus urban) with a different type of teacher. We also support work to gather follow-up data to examine the longer-term impact of an efficacious intervention. Under this goal, we also support retrospective studies to analyze historical secondary data to test the efficacy of an intervention implemented in the past. Program officers can certainly talk to you about different considerations for each of these types of Goal 3 studies.

Replication studies can include projects that aim to replicate an intervention that previously showed beneficial impacts for teachers and/or instructional personnel only, as long as the current study measures both teacher and/or instructional personnel and student education outcomes. For Follow-Up studies, you can propose to (1) follow teachers and/or instructional personnel who took part in the original study in subsequent years, when they are not receiving the intervention, in order to determine if the beneficial effects are maintained or (2) follow students who were taught by teachers and/or other instructional personnel targeted in the original study, in order to determine if the initial beneficial effects are maintained.

For Efficacy and Replication projects, there are a variety of research designs that can be used. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are a preferred design for IES, but we also allow, depending on your project and/or the populations that you're working with, a variety of designs, such as a regression continuity designs, single case experimental designs, and quasi-experimental designs. In particular, though, you have to argue that randomization is not possible and justify how the proposed design permits drawing causal conclusions about the effect of the intervention on the intended outcomes, explain how selection bias will be minimized or modeled, and discuss those threats to internal validity that are not addressed convincingly by the design and how conclusions from the research will be tempered in light of these threats. Because quasi-experimental designs can meet the WWC's standards for evidence with reservations only, it is also important to detail how you will ensure that the study meets these standards. This year, we have also added language around the acceptability of using Sequential, Multiple Assignment, Randomized Trials (SMARTs) to evaluate an adaptive treatment under Goal 3. There is additional detail about this included in the RFA. We are encouraging the field to think about adaptive interventions, or interventions that are responsive to individual needs of teachers and students; and SMARTs are one way of building and evaluating an adaptive treatment. So it's just one type of research design that can be used to evaluate an adaptive treatment. There are recommendations in the RFA for what information to include in your application, but if you have specific questions about these interventions and designs, we encourage you to contact the appropriate program officer. It's exciting that folks are interested in and thinking about adaptive treatments at the teacher level, so we're happy to have those conversations.

The fourth goal that we fund is the Effectiveness goal. This goal supports research to rigorously test whether the intervention has evidence of efficacy and produces improved teacher and student outcomes when implemented under *routine conditions* through an *independent evaluation*. The independent evaluation is not required in a Goal 3 Efficacy study; as I said, developers tend to be highly involved in the Goal 3 Efficacy studies. For example, under the Effectiveness goal, the intention is for the researchers to give an intervention to a school district and have them implement it and then the researchers will test whether the teacher and student outcomes are similar to those that have been found in more tightly controlled conditions (e.g., in an Efficacy grant). For Effectiveness projects, the intervention needs to be implemented under routine conditions (meaning there can be no special support to make sure it's implemented well) and it has to be an independent evaluation. The developer is not allowed to be as involved in an effectiveness goal as they would be under an efficacy study. They are more hands-off. These requirements have changed over the years, but prior to submitting an effectiveness proposal, the intervention must already have been found to have beneficial impacts on teacher and/or instructional personnel outcomes and student education outcomes by at least one prior efficacy study.

The last thing I'll mention about Effectiveness studies is that the requirements and recommendations for the research design are the same as those for Efficacy/Replication except that single-case experimental designs are not allowed as your primary research design in an Effectiveness study.

The last goal that we fund is the measurement goal (Goal 5). This goal supports the development of new assessments or refinement of existing assessments and the validation of those

assessments, as well as the validation of existing assessments for specific purposes, contexts, and populations. And again, given our focus, you must link the measure to teacher and instructional personnel outcomes and subsequent student outcomes in a measurement project.

This is a flowchart to help you as you prepare your application to think about your research questions, the focal teachers, and your outcomes of interest.

This table shows the award amounts for each type of project that we fund as well as a maximum grant duration, which varies depending on the goal and the type of project that you propose. We did have some reduction in award limits this year, again, because of our reduced funding, so if you've applied to us in the past or if this is a resubmission, you'll notice that there are slight reductions on the award limits, so pay careful attention to those. If you go over the dollar amount limit your application will get kicked out; you will not be responsive to the RFA.

This table shows important dates for you to know. The letter of intent due date has passed, but that's fine. Letters of intent are requested but not required, so if you were not able to get us a letter of intent, I would suggest that you reach out to the appropriate program officer to let them know of your interest, and then they can give you feedback and talk through some of the general requirements for the FY 2017 RFA. The application package is posted on Grants.gov, so you can go ahead and download that. The application deadline is August 4th at 4:30 P.M. sharp, and by sharp we mean not a half a second after 4:30. You will be marked late and you will not move forward in the review process. We always suggest that you start early with your submission. There can always be issues with submitting your grant application -- you forgot to check a box, etc. -- that can hold up the process. If you try to start the submission at 4:00 you're just not going to be happy by the time 4:30 rolls around. If you do receive a grant from us, in your proposal you can identify a start date for your project anytime between July 1st and September 1st of 2017.

Someone asked the question: Can you elaborate on the criteria and methods for identifying students at risk for a disability; for example, ED? There are very specific instructions in the RFA about what we mean when we say "at risk for a disability". Primarily, risk has to be determined on an individual student level, meaning you could not propose to focus on a low-income environment and say that every student in that classroom is at risk for a disability just because they come from a low-income background. There may be students that are certainly at risk within those classrooms, but they have to be identified at a student level, so often we'll see screeners, either through observations, teacher and/or parent report, etc., on certain academic and/or behavioral measures, etc., that indicate that those students are at elevated risk. There are a variety of different ways to determine risk. You could also determine risk based on a response to intervention model. If students aren't successful at that universal level of intervention that's implemented and they need additional support, you can make the argument that this might place students at risk. Because there are a variety of ways to do this, you can certainly discuss this with your program officer to determine what would make sense for your research questions.

Another question is: Can early intervention providers be targeted in other non-early intervention topics; in autism spectrum disorders, for example? The RFA will give you more information about the types of projects that we intend to fund within each of those topics. If you're focused

on an early childhood population, all of those applications go to the early intervention topic regardless of the type of disability and regardless of whether you're talking about pre-academic or behavioral outcomes.

There's another question: Do you have to propose the durations listed in the table you presented? The table on that slide indicated the maximum grant durations. You don't have to propose the maximum. You can request less money and less time than the maximum award and duration listed. For example, for years the Goal 2 Development and Innovation grants were three-year grants. Now, we allow four years for these grants primarily for interventions that are longer to implement. So if you are trying to develop a year-long curriculum, that's going to take you longer than developing a two-month intervention. So, there's some flexibility. You just have to make the argument for the time and the dollar amount that you need.

We have another question: Is it correct that an organization or group of organizations cannot apply for an Effectiveness grant unless one has already received an Efficacy grant? No, that's not true. When I talk about the goal structure and the different types of grants that we fund, you can come in at any of those goals. You could never have had a grant from us before and come in and apply for a Goal 4, Effectiveness grant. You don't have to have had a Goal 3, Efficacy grant for the particular intervention to apply for a Goal 4, but there does need to be an efficacy study on the intervention in order to apply for an effectiveness study.

Amy Sussman:

I'm going to start the second half of the webinar by quickly going through some examples of existing funded projects that would be appropriate for this RFA (note: these were not intended to be for this particular RFA, but are just examples of the types of projects that could fit with the special focus). For Goal 1, Exploration projects, this example shows you how you could do secondary data analysis to determine the potential impact of different characteristics of pre-service and in-service teacher training experiences on student education outcomes. An even clearer example might be a project that examines the association between the training program characteristics and teacher knowledge and skills and corresponding student outcomes. These are just examples of types of Exploration projects that could fit the FY 2017 special focus.

Next, here's an example of a Goal 2, Development and Innovation project that could fit the special focus. This is a project in which there was development and testing of a professional development program that addresses the knowledge, skills, and beliefs that teachers need to improve outcomes for students with ADHD. The researchers in this project are collecting data on the teachers as well as the students, as required in the new RFA.

This is an example of a Goal 3, Efficacy and Replication project. This project involves a randomized control trial to determine the efficacy of a professional development program to improve teachers' use of embedded instruction and outcomes of preschool children with disabilities. In this project, they're not just focusing on evaluating a professional development program, which you could do and that would be appropriate, but the researchers are also looking at the best way to implement coaching as part of their professional development. We don't have an example of a Goal 4, Effectiveness project, but it's because it would be the same type of research question as a Goal 3.

Finally, here's an example of a Goal 5, Measurement project. This project involves the development and validation of a special education teacher observation measure designed to evaluate and improve instructional practice delivered to students with disabilities. For FY 2017, the measure has to be linked to both teacher and student outcomes. In this particular example, the researchers are linking the measure to teacher practice and student growth.

Now we're going to move on to some commonly asked questions. First, *can you propose to do any laboratory research?* The answer is yes, but only in a limited amount and only under certain goals. Under Goals 1, 2, and 5 you can do some laboratory research, but you cannot do 100% of your research in a laboratory. Second, *can you propose to develop and/or test a student level intervention?* No, the applications that focus on the development or evaluation of an intervention (i.e., Goals 2, 3, and 4) must propose to develop and/or evaluate interventions that directly target the teachers and/or other instructional personnel. I think this is a key point that might trip some people up because a lot of experienced investigators have developed an intervention, and then they are used to coming in with an efficacy grant to evaluate that intervention. However, this may not be appropriate in FY 2017 because the focus really must be on the teachers and instructional personnel as the target, not just on teachers implementing a particular student-oriented intervention.

Jackie Buckley:

Before you move on, Amy, we've got some questions around that – trying to understand that distinction – and I think it is a difficult distinction. In FY 2017, we are not interested in projects that focus solely on the teacher's ability to implement a student level intervention. As Amy said, the intervention may be the vehicle through which you are targeting teachers perhaps, but the intent should be to focus on how teacher knowledge and skills can improve education outcomes for students with and at risk for a disability. It has to be clear that your research study is focused on teachers and/or other instructional personnel and the intent is to better understand and/or improve the knowledge and skills that teachers and other instructional personnel need to improve student outcomes. Thus, your focus cannot just be on the student level intervention that happens to be delivered by the teacher. For these types of questions, I urge you to reach out to the program officer, and we can help talk through your particular concerns and questions.

Amy Sussman:

The next commonly asked question is: *can you resubmit a previous application that was not funded?* Well, you can, and if your focus was on teachers and instructional personnel to begin with, then it can be resubmitted with just some revisions based on feedback. However, you might need to make more substantial revisions so that the focus is on teachers and instructional personnel. In this case, I would advise you to think about what your actual research questions are. If your research questions are not about the teachers and their knowledge and skills, but really about student outcomes, you might want to wait and submit next round when we're not focused specifically on this topic. Either way, if you do resubmit and even if you consider it a completely new proposal (even if you've made so many changes that you consider it new), you still have to address it in appendix A, to respond to previous reviews or to explain why this is a new proposal instead of a revised one. The next question is: *can you focus on pre-service teachers?* Yes, but only in a Goal 1, Exploration study. As long as it is under a Goal 1, you can

include pre-service teachers under any research topic. *Can you focus on related services personnel, for example, speech language pathologists, audiologists, interpreters, school psychologists, counselors, physical therapists, occupational therapists, social workers, who serve students K-12?* No, the research must be focused directly on the teachers and the instructional personnel, and not on related services providers in K-12. However, you can propose research focused on the related services personnel for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. *Can parents and students be considered other instructional personnel?* No, other instructional personnel include professionals and paraprofessionals who are responsible for educating students with or at risk for disability.

Now I'll give a very brief overview of the application process. First, you'll find the application packages on Grants.gov. This is a government-wide website. This is just a screenshot of what you'll see when you go there, and you'll have to find the correct application package for the specific IES competition when you get there.

There are two things that you'll need to apply. First, you'll need the RFA, which contains the information for writing your project narrative as well as information about submitting the applications through Grants.gov. Second, you'll need to find the correct application package on Grants.gov. In terms of registering for Grants.gov, the first and most important thing is to start early. Initial registration in Grants.gov can take five business days, and Grants.gov recommends allowing four full weeks to register. Even if you're already registered on Grants.gov, the annual update that you must complete could take three days. One thing to note here is that it's your institution that needs to register, not you as an individual researcher. Most institutions, especially universities, have sponsored project offices that are likely to take care of registering on Grants.gov, and they can do so if it hasn't already been done. But you may just want to check with them to make sure it's been completed before you go ahead and try to submit. Applications received by Grants.gov are date- and time-stamped to the second. You cannot be one second late or you're automatically going to be excluded from review. It has to be fully uploaded and submitted and the date time stamp must be no later than 4:30 P.M. Washington, D.C. time, August 4, 2016.

Now, I will briefly describe the peer review process. Once you submit and it goes through on time, we engage in an initial screening process during which applications are reviewed for compliance and responsiveness to the RFA. Compliance involves the technical parts of the proposal (e.g., formatting, page numbers, etc.) and responsiveness involves whether you addressed the requirements in the RFA. And please note there is a difference between requirements and recommendations, and it's the requirements that we're looking for during the screening process. However, obviously the recommendations would help you to be competitive as well. It is important to read the RFA very carefully because we do delineate what are requirements and what are recommendations. The applications that are compliant and responsive are assigned to a review panel. Two or three members of that panel conduct a primary review of each application and the most competitive applications are then reviewed by the full panel during a panel meeting where they're discussed.

So you may want to know how to track the status of your application. When you submit an application, you will be prompted to sign up for the Applicant Notification System (ANS), or if

you've submitted before, you should already have an account. This system will provide you with information about the status of the award. After the panel meeting (some time later), every applicant will receive an email notification through ANS on the status of your application and you'll also receive reviewer summary statements. You'll get to see each reviewer's remarks as well as a brief summary of the panel discussion. If you are not granted an award the first time you may want to talk to your program officer about a revision.

We have on our website a page called Resources for Researchers, and on this page you'll find links within our website. You can review past webinars, you can sign up for the current webinars that are going on this summer, and you can sign up for IES NewsFlash. If you sign up for the newsflash, you will receive emails with important updates, like competitions that are open, awards that were made, or reports that were released.

This slide shows you what the Resources for Researchers page looks like. I'm going to walk you through signing up for the IES NewsFlash. On the dropdown menu you'll go to the News and Events menu, and in that News and Events menu you'll see the second one down under news is NewsFlash.

When you go to the NewsFlash, this is what you'll see. You'll enter your email address and you'll choose which NewsFlash you want to sign up for. You can get as many as you would like – you can get a general one, you can get one for each center, you can choose from which centers you'd like to receive a Newsflash. So you can tailor it to the kind of news that you would like to receive.

When writing a grant application, read the request for applications carefully. It would also be a good idea to look at abstracts of funded projects. We have some examples in this Powerpoint, but keep in mind that these are only examples; we fund far more than that. So, it's a good idea to see the types of projects that go through the peer review process and get funded. In looking at abstracts of funded projects, remember that the requirements this year with the focus on teachers and instructional personnel might not be reflected in some of the funded projects that you'll find in the current abstracts. So just keep this in mind when you're looking for examples. We also suggest you take part in IES webinars. You can go to the webinar page on our website and see that there are many more webinars being offered this summer. We also encourage you to discuss your research idea with the program officer. It would be a good idea, especially if you're not sure whether it's appropriate for this competition, to email a synopsis (e.g., a couple of paragraphs or a page) to your program officer and then schedule a time for a phone call to talk about it. If you just have a really quick, short question you can simply email those questions to the program officer rather than setting up a conversation. But it is a very good idea to check with your program officer to make sure you're not writing a proposal that will ultimately not be appropriate. If you submitted a letter of intent, you will get a response from the program officer, and this response will both acknowledge the receipt of your letter and will also provide you with advice. Most of it will be links and reminders of how to proceed with the application process, but the program officer may also comment on specific aspects of your letter of intent to make sure that it is responsive. It will be a springboard for a discussion with the program officer about your potential idea. And for those of you who have submitted a letter of intent and have not yet received a reply, you will be getting one by the end of next week. And if you have not submitted

a letter, we suggest you go ahead and write one and email it directly to your program officer so that you can make sure that your proposed project fits this competition and it can be a springboard for discussion about your idea.

This is what the program officers are here for - to discuss whether your aims fit our 2017 competition; to make sure you're not only in the correct competition, but that you're submitting under the correct topic and the correct goal; and to springboard further discussion.

For more information, here is our contact information and a link to the general funding page where you'll see the different funding opportunities. Jackie and I gave the presentation and Katie has been answering your questions online. We're all happy to continue the conversation with any of you who are interested, particularly with the program officer of your topic. Now, we will take this time to answer your questions.

Q&A / Extra Comments

Jackie Buckley:

I do want to follow up on a couple of things. First, we had additional questions about whether it is appropriate to propose qualitative methods. We do allow for mixed methods research, so a combination of qualitative and quantitative research is allowed. We do see this methodology a lot under certain goals, such as Goal 2, Development and Innovation. We tend to see more qualitative here, especially during the development process, but mixed method research is encouraged and we do have information about that in the RFA as well. And again, that RFA is very detailed as far as the requirements and recommendations for a strong proposal, so we can't encourage you enough to read that in great detail because it does contain a lot of really important information.

Second, when we talk about "compliance," this includes things like page limits, font sizes, etc. These are spelled out in the RFA. For example, if you were to go over page limits, we have a contractor that would remove those extra pages and your application will go forward without the pages, and so you're going to be missing some critical information. Don't try to cheat the system by shrinking your font size or stretching the margins, because we have requirements for those too; and the contractor could change your font size and your margins back to where they should be. So pay attention to not only those requirements that we have for the content, but the compliance issues as well.

Amy Sussman:

I also want to add to that if you're not the one who is physically pressing the button to submit the application, make sure you check before it gets submitted to see if the budget is correct and all components are included. Sometimes other offices, perhaps the sponsored projects office, will work with the budget and you won't realize that they've gone over the limit. So just make sure you see the absolute last draft of that budget before it gets submitted.

Jackie Buckley:

Also, I've been asked this before, we do intend to have our full RFA next year (everything will be dependent on funding), with the same topics and goals but more flexibility within the topics

and the opportunity to focus on a variety of targets (e.g., student-focused interventions). So I wanted to note it, and also that if you submit this year and it does not get funded, our intention is that you would be able to resubmit next year even though our RFA might revert back to our full RFA and the student focus, etc. We would allow those resubmissions in future years.

Amy Sussman:

We look forward to hearing from those of you who have not already contacted us about your ideas. This concludes the webinar.

Thank you!

[end of transcript]