



Institute of Education Sciences Funding Opportunities Webinar Series

Overview of the Evaluation of State &
Local Education Programs & Policies
(Topic 3 under 84.305H)

Webinar Transcript

June 26, 2013

**IES Funding Opportunities Webinar Series:
Overview of the Evaluation of State &
Local Education Programs & Policies
(Topic 3 under 84.305H)**

**Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education**

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National Center for Education Sciences**

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Slide 1

The Evaluation of State & Local Education Programs & Policies funding opportunity will support new and existing partnerships composed of research institutions and state and local education agencies to carry out rigorous evaluations of the education programs or policies that are implemented by state or local education agencies under routine conditions to improve student outcomes from prekindergarten through postsecondary and adult education. During this webinar, Institute of Education Sciences (IES) staff will provide information on applying for a state and local evaluation grant, including the requirements for the partnerships and their research.

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Welcome everyone, this is Allen Ruby, and today I am going to give a short overview of IES and this grant program, and then we will jump into Topic 3, “Evaluation of State & Local Education Programs & Policies,” which I may abbreviate during the talk as “State/Local.” I will discuss the purpose of these projects, the partnerships that are required, additional requirements, the project narrative—which is a key substantive portion of your application—and a few of the other sections of the application.

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IES has three primary missions: describing the condition and progress of education in the United States; identifying education practices and improving academic achievement and access to education opportunities, and evaluating the effectiveness of federal and other education programs.

Slide 4

IES has a director, appointed by the President, confirmed by the Senate, who is advised by the Board. Under the Director are four centers. The first two are the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), which does large-scale contracted evaluations of federal and other programs, and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which examines the condition of education in the United States. The other two Centers are the grant-making centers: the National Center for Education Research (NCER), which I belong to; and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSEER). These are the two centers where the Program Officers are housed that can work very closely with you on writing your grant application. The State/Local grant topic is housed in NCER but because it can fund projects evaluating state and local special education programs and policies, it is also of interest to NCSEER. The Standards & Review Office, which is the part of the Office of the Director, is in charge of the peer review process. Because the Program Officers in NCER and NCSEER are not part of the review process, we can work closely with you as you develop your application.

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The purpose of IES grant programs is to answer four questions. First, what works to improve student educational outcomes, so that we can disseminate education interventions with evidence of beneficial impacts; second, what doesn't work, so hopefully we can suggest to folks to stop using such interventions; third, what works for whom and where, so we can use education interventions with the appropriate people in the appropriate places; and, finally, underlying all this is why do things work, which will help us build a theory of how to improve education and lead to further advances in the field.

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The Director has a set of priorities, which are approved by the Board. In the newest set of priorities, which are on the website listed on this slide, partnerships are noted. Their purpose is to help focus research on issues that policymakers and practitioners are most concerned about, and also to find ways in which researchers can communicate their findings in an understandable and useful fashion that then assists practitioners with their work.

Through these partnerships, policymakers and practitioners will have a role in setting the research agenda and there will be constant communication going back and forth between the researchers and the policymakers and practitioners, so that they get timely information on the results and can also give their input to what the results may mean.

The State/Local grant topic has always promoted this, because part of its purpose is to evaluate state and local programs and policies and then give feedback to the states and districts that are involved in the research.

I think one of the lessons we have learned about partnerships from the State/Local projects is that partnerships can actually lead to stronger research—both in the design and analysis. For example, a State/Local project in Oregon, which was using a regression discontinuity design, had the methodologists go to the schools to explain to them what a regression discontinuity design is, what a cut-off point is, and why ensuring that you assign students using that cut-off point is really very important to obtaining the evidence needed to know if the program is working. Then the project also made some adjustments in the design itself; for example, allowing, in this case, 5 percent of students in a school to be assigned outside the cut-off point. If a principal or teacher felt the student would or would not benefit from the program, they could assign those students, up to 5 percent of them, outside the cut-off point, and those students would not be included in the design.

The result of these efforts were that practitioners understood the design, and implemented it correctly, while at the same time, the researchers gave practitioners room to make some changes to do what they felt was important. This led to a stronger design. This is a third reason why we are promoting partnerships.

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IES has been increasing its emphasis on partnerships with the research grant programs. Partnerships have always been possible under the primary grant programs, the Education Research Programs and Special Education Research Grants. In 2009, IES began the State/Local grant program which required partnerships. Last year, IES started the Researcher-Practitioner Partnership Program to fund initial research by a partnership. This year we have created a single grant program to support partnerships that includes the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships, the State/Local Evaluations, and a new topic, Continuous Improvement. Today, we are going to focus on the Evaluation of State & Local Education Programs & Policies topic. We have had previous webinars on the other two topics: the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research and Continuous Improvement Research in Education. Those slides and transcripts will be posted shortly.

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The primary purpose of the State/Local topic is to promote joint evaluation research by research institutions and state and local education agencies. They are to focus on a specific education program or policy of key importance to the agency. You will want to

write your application identifying the specific program or policy you intend to evaluate and provide a description of it. You should not write an application stating that the partnership will determine what programs or policies it will evaluate *after* receiving the grant.

The evaluation should contribute directly to state or district decisionmaking. You should discuss how the state or district will use the findings from the evaluation to make changes in the program. It may be to reform the program, revise it, adapt it, broaden it in some cases, or reduce it in others. Then there will be opportunities during this grant to develop the partnership further, but these are to be developed by doing the joint work to carry out the evaluation. The grant is not to support partner-building activities for the sake of the partnership. Partner-building activities should support the evaluation.

The other purpose of the State/Local topic is to foster longer term research partnerships. If the initial partnership and initial evaluation prove useful both sides may say, “Oh, this kind of research is both interesting to do from a research perspective and contributes to the literature, and from a practitioner point of view it is actually helpful to our practice; let’s continue this partnership to carry out further research.”

For example, a State/Local project in Michigan includes the Michigan Department of Education with the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. Midway through the grant they decided that the partnership was beneficial to everyone, so they created a new organization called the “Michigan Consortium for Education Research,” which is developing new research ideas and funding sources to further the work of interest to all.

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Let’s get into the details of the State/Local topic. As I mentioned, you want to identify an education program or policy implemented by a state or local education agency that is both of high priority to the agency and intended to improve student achievement, and evaluate its impacts on student outcomes (as well as any intermediate impacts). Past projects have covered a wide range of programs and policies—there was no area to focus on. IES has made 13 State/Local awards and the projects are evaluating such programs and policies as expanded prekindergarten programs, professional development programs for prekindergarten teachers, gifted education program and policy within a large district, dual-language immersion in an urban school district, student retention policy and modified high school curriculum, and high school exit exams. IES is trying to focus on programs and policies of high concern to the district or the state, and the results from which that can then be used for the agency to make further decisions.

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This slide lists the expected products of the grant. First of all is the causal evidence you can provide on the impact of this program or policy. That is the primary purpose of the grant. Second, there is a theory of change underlying this program or policy. Typically, it is not as detailed or involved as it would be for a researcher-developed intervention, but there certainly is underlying logic for how this program or policy is intended to improve student outcomes. The evaluation should address whether the expected theory of change is correct or is incorrect and needs to be revised.

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If a beneficial impact is found, then the evidence will support the continuation of the program or policy and perhaps promote its use by other districts or states. To support the latter, the project should identify the tools, procedures, and supports used to foster full implementation. For example, the Tennessee study of class size provided evidence that smaller classes led to higher student achievement. But the same results were not found when a smaller class size was implemented in California. One of the explanations for this was that California implemented the policy differently. So it is important to understand implementation, as well as impact.

On the other hand, if a beneficial impact is not found, you will want to examine possible reasons. Was it an implementation issue? Did the program or policy not work as theorized? If a specific problem or obstacle is found, is there the possibility of revising this program or policy to improve it? The revision won't be done under this project but it could be a follow-up project.

Under a State/Local grant, you can give feedback to the state or the district as you are doing the evaluation. Oftentimes, when people do causal evaluations, they say, "I can't have any discussion with the implementer because they may change and that would change what I am evaluating." Under a State/Local grant, that is okay. It may be that you do a multi-year evaluation and, as you give feedback each year, the policy or program changes and you are doing an evaluation of a somewhat different intervention the next year. Under this grant topic, the purpose is both to learn about the intervention, but also to inform the state or the district so that improvements can take place.

Question: *"Which policies and programs are eligible? Is it only for new policies, or can long existing policies that have never been evaluated qualify?"*

Answer: *"Thank you for that question, because that is a great point. It is for a policy, long existing or new, that has never been evaluated. You can do any type of policy, as long as there isn't already a literature saying this works or this doesn't work. Also, if the*

policy is somewhat different than the past research, you can come back and say, “Well this is a new version of the policy or the program; therefore, it is worth evaluating again.”

For example, one of the State/Local grants is an evaluation of New York City’s retention policy. Evaluations of retention policy in the past have not found them effective. In some cases, they have found them detrimental. Now, some of the newer evaluation work is finding beneficial impacts. This may be to the use of better methods but it also may be because the policy has changed. Retention policy in the past, and in many places today, just meant you repeat the grade. More recently, retention policies have included multiple approaches that combine summer school, extra support classes, and multiple opportunities for a student to show they had met the requirements and could return to their on-track status. The actual intervention has changed over time, so it becomes important to evaluate the newer version.

In addition, we want to know a bit about the financial cost of the policy. Again, this isn’t a cost benefit or cost effectiveness analysis, although you can propose those, but you should gather enough financial information so that if another state or district wants to try it, they can have some information about what the cost of implementing it would be.”

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Now let’s turn to some of the more specific requirements. The first requirement is that you must address student outcomes. Now you should also look at intermediate outcomes as specified by your theory of change (e.g., change in behavior of teachers or principals, changes in the organization of the school, or the implementation of a program or policy). Your evaluation should work down the chain of outcomes arriving at student outcomes to see if this program or policy has a beneficial impact on the student. When we are talking about education outcomes here we are looking at academic outcomes and also the social and behavioral competencies that support student success in school. In two slides we will go into more detail.

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The next requirement is that you address students. This grant program supports research on students from prekindergarten through postsecondary education and adult education. You can address typically developing students, and/or you can also address students with disabilities or at risk for disabilities. If you are interested in research on students at risk for disabilities, I would ask you to look at the specific requirements as set by our National Center for Special Education Research on the website to make sure that your work fits within their definition before applying to address an at-risk population. The State/Local topic does not support research on children from birth to age three. The

topic addresses students starting at prekindergarten, which is about age three or four, and then goes on from there.

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Now let's put together this idea of focusing on student outcomes for students at different grade levels to illustrate what kind of student outcomes I am talking about. If you are looking at prekindergarten, the focus is on school readiness, such things as pre-reading and language and vocabulary, early math and science knowledge, and some of the social and behavioral competencies that students learn in prekindergarten to prepare them for going to school. For kindergarten to grade 12, there are two types of outcomes. The first is measures of achievement such as reading, writing, math, and science, and the major academic subjects. These can be grades or test scores that reflect achievement. Second is the outcomes that reflect progress through the education system, so completing or being retained in courses and grade; graduating high school or dropping out; and also the social skills, attitudes, and behaviors that support these types of outcomes.

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For postsecondary education, which is sub-baccalaureate and baccalaureate education, not advanced degrees, the primary outcomes are access to, persistence in, progression through, and completion of postsecondary education. For mainstream postsecondary students, IES does not include achievement in academic subjects e.g., grades and test scores in academic subjects. However, for students in developmental education programs, student outcomes include achievement in reading, writing, English language proficiency, and mathematics. Again, this is only for students in developmental or remedial education, not for the regular education postsecondary students.

Adult education, which we define as students over age 16 and outside the K-12 system, includes adult basic education, adult secondary education, adult English as a second language (ESL), and general educational development (GED) preparation. Under adult education, the student outcomes include both the achievement outcomes in reading, writing, and math; and the access to, and the progress outcomes of enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of the adult education program.

As you write your application, please make sure you address some of these outcomes. If you don't, you risk having your application rejected as being nonresponsive to the Request for Applications, and it will not be sent forward for peer review.

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The next requirement is that the application must come from a partnership. It may be a new partnership or it may be an existing one. In contrast to the Continuous Improvement topic which requires 1 year of previous work by the partnership before applying, here, you don't need that past relationship for the State/Local topic. You can apply with a fairly recent partnership that is based on mutual interest or your partnership may be a long-standing one.

As part of the partnership, you will have at least one principal investigator (PI) from a research institution and a PI from the state or local education agency. The PI from the research institution must have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research and understand the education issue that is being addressed, and the PI from the local agency must have decisionmaking authority for the issue within their agency. So, for example, a principal from a school would not be an adequate PI from the agency partner because he or she probably wouldn't have decisionmaking authority across the entire district. You could include them as a Co-PI if they were playing a large role in the project but you would still need a person from the district or state agency with an agency-level role in the program or policy.

There are going to be different levels of decisionmaking. A superintendent may make the final decision or a board's approval may be needed but it's not like a superintendent will have the time to be a PI on a project. An assistant superintendent may have partial decisionmaking authority regarding a policy or program and may have enough time available. So, the assistant superintendent can be the PI but it would be useful to discuss regular briefings of the superintendent regarding the project.

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Let's talk a bit about the definition of the state and local education partners. In a state these are often called "education agencies, departments, boards, commissions." They may oversee early learning, elementary, secondary, postsecondary, higher, and/or adult education; they may be very focused on one of these or they may encompass most of these. They include education agencies in the U.S. territories, as well as tribal education agencies. The key point is that they are an education agency. You could include the state health agency as a partner but you would still need the state education agency. If you were looking at students in prisons, you might include the juvenile justice agency but you still need an education agency involved as a partner.

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Local education agencies (LEAs) are primarily the public school districts. In addition, some states have set up community college districts, so those would be considered a local postsecondary agency.

What are not included here are nonpublic organizations that oversee and administer schools. So charter organizations and education management organizations cannot be the education agency partner. They can be included as additional partners but you will still need to partner with the agency that oversees them. If there is a state education agency that oversees charter schools, they need to be there, because that is the organization that is helping to set policy over charter schools, and they need to be in a position to help set the research agenda and early access to the results.

Postsecondary education agencies may also include state and city postsecondary systems. For postsecondary systems that are overseen by a state or local education agency (e.g., a higher education commission, board, or agency), that agency must be included as the agency partner (the system can also be included as a partner as well). If there is no overarching state or city education agency that oversees a postsecondary system, then the system can apply as the sole agency partner.

Just to be clear, though, a postsecondary system cannot study itself. Let's say you had a postsecondary system without an overseeing agency and it wanted to look at some policy or program inside itself, it would have to go outside itself, to some other research institution, as its research partner. A postsecondary system, or institution within the system, can serve as a research institution. It may serve as the education agency. But it can't serve as both in one project—that also means one institution within a postsecondary system (e.g., a center or a campus) cannot serve as the research institution partner with the postsecondary system as the education agency partner.

Question: *“Does the PI from a state or local agency have to be from the research department? Can it be a nonresearcher or someone without research experience?”*

Answer: *“The answer is, no and yes. The PI does not have to be from the research department, because, as I said, the PI from the state or local agency must have decisionmaking authority over the policy or program. That is often unlikely to be somebody from the research department. If you also have a high-ranking research department person and you want them to be a Co-PI, that is fine. They can join as a Co-PI, but it is unlikely that they are going to be on as the primary Co-PI because they won't have decisionmaking authority. That means, then, that the PI from the state or local agency may not have research experience. That may not be their background.*

Their background may be policy implementation or program implement or program oversight, and that is why we want them there, because as the research results come in, we want them to have the ability to say, “Oh, this is not working, let’s make some changes in the policy of the program.”

Thank you for that question. It is a good distinction.”

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Additional partners should be considered if they will contribute to the work. If there are multiple state or local education agencies that are implementing the same program or policy, or perhaps implementing a variant of the program or policy, you may want to include more than one in order to learn more from the research and provide results that can be used by a larger number of practitioners. If you do include more than one you have to make it clear how they all contribute to the research. What IES does not want to see is the inclusion of multiple education agencies because they have all worked with the same research institution rather than they share program and policy commonalities. If you bring in multiple states and districts, it is because they are implementing the same policies, or a variant of the policy, and there is something we will learn additionally from bringing in an additional district.

You can bring in non-education state and local agencies as partners. I mentioned bringing in juvenile justice if you are looking at students in prison who are being educated. If you are working with foster children or homeless children, you will probably want to bring in the social services department. They may be playing an important role in these students’ education or identification. That agency may also learn quite a bit from the evaluation. Again, you still have to have the education agency as a partner.

You can include more than one research institution. This is often done if there is different expertise at different institutions. Sometimes it is done through a subcontract or a consulting contract with a person at another institution, because they bring some sort of substantive or methodological skill that will improve the project.

You can bring in other non-research organizations. Community groups or stakeholder groups may be very interested in the evaluation of a program or a policy. Oftentimes, they can contribute to the process (e.g., they may help with recruitment). If you want to get parents to agree to fill out surveys or have their students tested, sometimes these community groups will be very helpful if they understand the purpose of the evaluation. Additionally, they are probably going to be very interested in the outcomes of the work. They may be able to help push the results to make the changes that the evidence shows should be made.

I have just covered all the requirements. If we have no more questions, I am going to move on to the next section, which is the project Research Narrative.

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The Research Narrative is the substantive part of your application. It is a maximum of 25 pages and you should take advantage of all the pages. The peer reviewers focus on the Research Narrative. It is divided into four sections: Significance, Research Plan, Personnel, and Resources.

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Let's start off with the Significance section. This section addresses two separate issues: 1) the partnership, and 2) the program or policy to be evaluated.

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You should describe all the partners. Who is involved? Why are they involved? What is their common interest? What are their complementary abilities? How will everybody contribute and benefit from this work? Don't assume the reviewers know everybody. The reviewers are experts in very different areas of education. They have to be able to review all the different policies and programs. They may not be familiar with your specific policy. They may not be familiar with your institution (research institution or your state and local education agency), so you should spend a little space giving descriptive details.

You will want to show that your partnership has been grounded in some previous discussions. Now, while they can be brand new partnerships, it is important to show that it wasn't just a phone call saying, "Hey, do you want to be part of a grant proposal?" "Okay, I will take part." You want to show that there has been some discussions and perhaps joint work leading up to this application. Of course, the Significance will differ a bit for a new partnership versus an existing partnership. If you are brand new, you want to talk about how this new partnership came about so quickly, why it should succeed, why there is joint interest in the partnership on such a short-term basis. For an existing partnership, there is this question of, "If you had a successful partnership before, why do you need a grant?" Are you working in a new area? Is this just such a large program and the partnership has only done smaller work in the past? Is it a chance to do larger work together?

You should talk a bit about the partnership infrastructure. How are the two groups or all the partnerships involved, going to stay in regular contact with each other? How are they going to make decisions? There may be differences of opinions at different times.

How are the decisionmakers going to be kept abreast of everything? A key issue here is what happens with turnover, because we do see high rates of turnover in some state and local education agencies; so a partnership should not be dependent on one person within a state or local education agency. There should be a group there, so that if one person leaves, the project can continue. This is true of a research institution, too. If a leading researcher leaves, show that other people in the project have the connection to maintain the partnership as well.

You want to make it clear that the partners understand what their evaluation is going to do, understand what their responsibilities are in this evaluation, and agree to them. There may not be a history of working together, but it is helpful to show that the state or local agency considers this research of high value, has been working on this issue, and is open to the evaluation design proposed in this application. And it is helpful if the research institution discusses how it intends to work together with the state and local agencies to make sure that the design is acceptable and to make sure that findings are quickly communicated and agency input is considered and addressed.

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We mentioned the stage of the partnership—a new or mature relationship—when talking about capacity to work together. If there is a history, you should not shy away from it. A strong partnership is a positive thing. These are large evaluations that occur over multiple years, if you can show you have done joint work together successfully in past years on past projects, that is evidence that we can expect this project can succeed.

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It may be that the partnership came together specifically because both sides say, “Here is a program or policy and we want to know if it works.” That is enough of an intent to make the partnership significant.

If you want to, you can also expand on this. Will there be any agency capacity-building? That is a very broad term. It can be anything from helping the agency to understand how to use evidence from research, to pulling together data from different datasets, to training agency personnel in evaluation methods. You may take a graduate student or a postdoctoral student and place them inside the agency, and have them take part in this work; they are also going to be available to do other work that the agency needs to have done.

The second issue you may discuss is other efforts to build a longer term partnership. You may not know now, but some of the work proposed (e.g., database development) could lead to future joint research.

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Let's switch over to the other part of Significance. One part of Significance is on the partnership; the other part of Significance is why you want to evaluate this program or policy. You should describe the issue or problem the education agency is addressing through this specific program or policy that you are going to evaluate. Why is this important to student achievement and why is it important to the education agency and others? Here is an example from the work being done in Broward County on its Gifted Program. Broward County had a concern that there was a disparity in who was getting into the Gifted Program: that minorities were not getting in. They implemented a policy of universal testing of all students—universal IQ testing. In the past it had been voluntary. Part of the evaluation was to see if the universal testing led to a reduced disparity in who got into gifted education. The other part of the evaluation is whether gifted education actually causes better student achievement. These two issues are of interest to many education agencies. There are gifted and talented programs across the country, and both these questions—how to get our students into gifted programs and whether they are really improving student outcomes—are important to many education agencies.

Once you have justified why this is an important issue, then you should describe the actual program or policy you want to evaluate. What is it composed of? Does it modify or differ from existing practice? Again, when I say “existing practice,” that doesn't mean it has to be a new policy, but it may differ from practice in other districts or other states. This policy you are evaluating may be very different, and the evaluation may be useful to other states as well.

The program or policy has to be fully developed and ready to implement. In the past, we tried to support evaluations of new programs and policies coming online in the near future. The problem was that the applications came in and said, “We are not quite sure yet what the state is going to do, so we are setting up this infrastructure to prepare an evaluation design once we are sure.” This type of proposal is extremely difficult to review, because reviewers don't know what the program or policy is. For that reason, when you apply your program or policy has to be in place and ready to go or already under implementation. As part of describing the ready-to-implement program or policy, you should identify the fidelity measures you will use to assess implementation. It may be that some programs or policies do not have a fidelity measure associated with them; you can use the first few months of the project to develop a fidelity measure, but you

want to start this implementation of the evaluation fairly quickly. You are not going to spend a year or two creating a psychometrically strong fidelity measure. You need to do that in a much shorter period of time.

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To reiterate a previous point, you should describe how this program or policy is linked to student outcomes. You want to show the theory of change underlying the program or policy you are evaluating. How does it expected to improve student achievement? What is it to directly change and indirectly change? It may not go directly to student outcomes. It may go to some intervening mechanism. This will then tell you, “We need to measure all the way through this chain that leads to student outcomes.” Oftentimes, it is much easier to understand a graphic than it is to do this descriptively and write out a whole page.

For example, Indiana implemented a formative assessment system using electronic technology to get the results quickly, in kindergarten through 2nd grade, and another system in grades 3 through 8. It had a very simple underlying theory of change: the teachers would use formative assessment regularly. The technology would get them the results back much more quickly. They could then identify the specific reading or math problems students had, and then they could differentiate instruction to address each student’s problems. If they knew this student didn’t understand—based on the formative assessment—they could change their instruction, and this, then, would increase the chances that the student would overcome their problems and learn more. As a result students would read better and/or do math better, and they would display this increased knowledge on the State Standardized Achievement Test.

This tells us what we need to measure. We need to see if teachers understand the formative assessment system. Do they understand how to use it? Was the professional development given to them helpful in using the system, and did the treatment teachers use it more than perhaps control teachers (formative assessment is used almost everywhere)? Did we see a change in instruction? Did we actually see differentiation with instruction with the treatment teachers, and did we find an impact on students’ reading and/or math achievement?

Set out a clear theory of change for the program or policy. Again, it probably won’t be as defined or intricate as a researcher developed intervention, but it still should be clear enough to show why this intervention is expected to help students and the processes through which it is expected to work.

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You will want to talk about implementation of this new program or policy. It may be an ongoing long-standing program/policy with a clear implementation. If it is something the state or district is putting in place right now, then you will want to provide evidence that it will be implemented as planned. Overall, you should make clear who determines if the program and policy will be implemented and who will oversee it.

This gets back to the issue of what was meant by a state- or district-implemented program or policy. The state or the district has made a decision that this program or policy will be implemented and has provided resources to implement it. They may implement it directly. They may contract out for somebody else to implement it, but it is their program or policy that is being implemented, and they are responsible for it and they are overseeing it. That is what we mean by a program or policy that should be evaluated on this grant topic. It is not a program or policy that a researcher has developed and the agency has given the researcher permission to try it out in some of the schools (that type of evaluation belongs under 84.305A or 84.324A). It is a program or policy adopted by the agency for implementation across the state or district.

You should describe the specifics of how and when will it be implemented, and who will implement each component, and show that it is feasible. Obviously, if this is a current program or policy, there is evidence that implementation has been and is feasible, but if it is a brand new policy being brought online, then you are going to want to show that supports and authority are in place, and funding has been provided for the program or policy.

Another issue is to show that wide implementation is being done. Is it being implemented on a sufficient scale that the evaluation can address multiple settings and/or a large enough population? It needs to be implemented under typical conditions—just as if a state or district was implementing a program. It shouldn't be implemented with additional support just for this project. For this reason, none of the funds in this grant can be used to support the implementation of the program or the policy. All the funds must be used only for evaluation.

That does not mean you cannot pay district people to do work on the evaluation. It just means you are not paying district people to do the implementation of the intervention itself. So you can pay teachers to fill out surveys; you can pay district personnel to administer tests whose results are used to evaluate the program; but you cannot pay them to implement the actual intervention itself.

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It is helpful to end the Significance section with a summary paragraph saying, overall, why this program or policy should be evaluated, and why it is important to the state or local agency and to the field of practice. This sets the peer reviewers up for the Research Plan section, because you will say here is why it is important, now here is the evaluation design.

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Let's go on to the Research Plan.

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You should state your research questions with hypotheses and describe your sample. What is the sampling universe? How is selection taking place? Who is being excluded and included? What are the strategies to reduce attrition? In the Indiana case I mentioned earlier, the state was rolling out the formative assessment program over a number of years. Schools volunteered each year to take part, and the volunteers were divided into a treatment and control group with the treatment grouping receiving the intervention that year and the control group receiving it the next year. You can see that in Year 1, you are getting the schools who want to use this program right away. In Year 2, you are getting the next set. The samples change somewhat from year to year. In addition, all schools that had used these two technologies in the past were excluded from the study. Schools for whom this technology was brand new and who volunteered to take part were the sample being studied.

In this case, the strategy to reduce attrition was fairly easy: (1) at some point you are going to have to implement this state-required program; and, (2) if you are a control school, you are going to get it next year. You just have to wait a year, and then you will get the support for the technology.

Other projects have made changes after attrition has occurred. For example, sub-sampling attrited students to see if there are differences between treatment and control; if there aren't, then attrition is not as important. If recruitment is too low or attrition too high, some projects will add a second cohort. To be avoided are recruitment or attrition problems that lead to the loss of a strong evaluation design.

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You want to have a strong research design that can be used to make causal inference. This is an evaluation. We want to be able to draw conclusions on whether the intervention works. We want to discuss, "Is there internal validity of the design?" You

are going to want to look at equivalence at the baseline, and this is true even if you are doing an experiment. You are going to want to be able to start off saying the two groups are equivalent on the characteristics of interest. Again, make sure that you have a way to look at any bias that may come from attrition, either overall or differential, built into your design.

You are going to want to look at fidelity of implementation. This is really important for several reasons. First of all, you don't want to end up with a study that says the evaluation had no impact, but, by the way, we don't know why because only half the people implemented it and we didn't realize that until near the end. That is not a very useful finding because then people will come back and say, "Well, if we had done better implementation it might have worked better, so let's just redo the whole study again with better implementation." You should check fidelity from the start and find this out early on so you can give feedback to the state and say, "Look, we are not getting good implementation, so this evaluation probably won't find impacts. I think the agency should do something to improve implementation." Or, you may find implementation is impossible. This intervention and this policy just can't work in your current school system the way they are set up. Teachers don't have the time to do it, or principals don't have the time to carry it out, or it is conflicting with some other requirements. Maybe it is not really supporting what is taught on the test. This would be an important finding for the agency.

Also, if you are examining a program that provides training or professional development to education personnel (e.g., teachers or administrators), implementation fidelity also includes the fidelity of the training. Questions around fidelity include, "Did the treatment group receive the training as planned?" as well as, "Did the treatment group implement what they were trained on as planned?" Determining whether the training went as planned can contribute to understanding the fidelity of the implementation of the program or policy.

In addition, you want to identify what the comparison group receives. If you don't find any impacts, it may be because the comparison group is actually doing something quite similar to the program or policy.

In the Indiana study, they found that formative assessment was being conducted in many schools, not just in treatment schools. Now the control schools might not have the same technology, but if they are interested in formative assessment, they are going to get out there and find something to use, and you would expect very different results if the control group is doing something very similar versus not doing something similar at

all. It is really important to have a plan to find out what the comparison group is doing, as well as what the treatment group is doing.

Slide 32

The preferred design is a randomized controlled trial (RCT). You should note the unit of randomization and reason for it. You need to describe how random assignment will take place and how to maintain its integrity. Reviewers will be concerned if randomized assignment is left up to the practitioners. If somehow the agency is going to be involved in random assignment, it is very important to spend some time with them discussing what random assignment really means, because there are many people who don't have a good understanding of what random means, how it should be done, and why it is important for the integrity of the design. We have had projects in the past that proposed but did not implement random assignment because the practitioners have had a role in it and they did not understand its actual meaning.

The type of sample being used often leads to different design challenges. If all schools are included in assignment, then there may be resistance among some of the treatment schools leading to lower fidelity of implementation. If volunteers are used, then there may be problems retaining the comparison group.

Lotteries are often used for student-level assignment, but retaining the control group may be a problem as students may leave the district to obtain the type of education they were seeking. This often happens in gifted and magnet programs for the students who don't get in. Their parents will say, "Okay, I am sending them to private school. I am going to take them to another district." Then, they drop out of the study. They may not be state-tested. You may not have any access to them if they are state-tested. You probably will not know what kind of intervention they are getting.

I mentioned staggered rollouts before with the Indiana study—volunteers come in; the treatment group gets it. The control group waits a year and then receives the program. This can be effective in keeping the control group in the study but the drawback is you only have a 1-year difference in implementation. So, you need to think, "Do I expect an impact in 1 year?" If not, staggered rollout may not be a fair evaluation of the intervention. If you have an intervention where you think it is going to take 1 year for the teacher to learn how to do it, and then in their second year they will be great implementers, this may not be a situation for a staggered rollout.

Slide 33

If a RCT is not possible, you will want to justify why this is so (e.g., it may just be as simple as stating that this state or district, does not believe in randomly assigning students or randomly assigning schools). Then, you will want to discuss an alternative that minimizes your model selection bias. I mentioned we have some regression of discontinuity designs going. For example, in Oregon the combination of tests on reading and oral language is being used to make a cut-off. In New York City, standardized test scores were being used for cut-off. In Broward County, the IQ test was being used as a cut-off to get into the gifted program.

You may also consider other well-designed quasi-experimental designs. For example, comparative interrupted time series may be strong enough. Typically, matching designs that only use commonly available variables are not considered strong enough by the peer reviewers because they are not seen as being able to control for unobserved factors.

Slide 34

You will want to talk about your statistical power. Having adequate power avoids the issue that if you do not find a statistically significant result, it is not because your sample size was too small. Describe your power analysis in detail. Justify the method used to calculate power and include all your assumptions. Some of the reviewers actually check the power calculations, and they report this out in the panel. If a reviewer says, “I couldn’t replicate the power analysis,” that is a strong concern for the rest of the panel. Provide power analyses for the main impact analysis but also for any confirmatory subgroup analyses. If you say, “I am going to make causal assumptions for the entire population, as well as the subgroups,” you will need to show power analyses for the subgroup analyses as well.

Slide 35

Among your outcome measures, you will want to include outcomes that are relevant to states, districts, and schools (e.g., test scores, grades, promotion rates, retention rates, high school graduation rates, discipline referrals, special education placements, college enrollment or completion rates). These are outcomes which your partners are concerned with. You can also include researcher-developed measures, and justify why you want to include them and what you will learn from them, but these aren’t your primary outcome measures. You will want to talk about the reliability and validity and appropriateness of your measures, and you will want to show how they fit into the theory of change.

Question: “Do you have any examples of doing a randomized control trial for long existing policies and programs? It would be more difficult to design a RCT for something that is already in place for a long time.”

Answer: “What is difficult is to design a RCT for something that is being used with everybody already; that might be an old program or a new program. Then, you are running into a problem of who the comparison group will be. There are examples of evaluating existing programs and policies using RCTs. Lotteries are a clear example. The IES-supported early childhood study going on in Tennessee uses lotteries to get into these prekindergarten programs; the dual language immersion study in Oregon uses lotteries for getting into special schools where students are taught in another language. The real problem comes when everybody is implementing a policy or program and no one in the state or district is available to be the comparison group. If you have the data, that is when you have a comparative interrupted time-series; but even then the question is, “What is my comparison group, do I have to go outside the state, and do I have to go outside the district? I really have to do some serious matching there that will convince the reviewers that I am making good matches.”

Slide 36

For fidelity of implementation, describe the properties of the measures you are using and describe the fidelity study and how it will be carried out. In both the treatment group and the comparison group, discuss how these data will be analyzed. How will you be including results of the fidelity study in the overall evaluation? Will you do a dose response? It may not be causal. It may be exploratory, but it may contribute. If you show students who got more of an intervention have better outcomes, that contributes to the evidence of the program’s impact.

You can do state and local projects that only use historical data. For example, we had a study looking at Massachusetts high school exit exams—it was a regression discontinuity. How did students do below the cut-off point versus students above the cut-off point? One of the project’s findings was that low-income students who scored below the cut-off were less likely to retake the test and more likely not to complete high school and not go on to college. Higher income students were more likely to retake the test, pass it, and go on to college. In this project, it was difficult to do a fidelity study because the policy was being evaluated retrospectively. In contrast, prospective studies should have strong fidelity studies. For example, the Michigan study looking at a more rigorous high school curriculum is doing a transcript study to determine if students are actually taking more difficult courses under the new curriculum.

Slide 37

Who makes up your comparison group, how are they similar or different from the treatment group, what do they receive in place of the treatment? Are they receiving something similar or not, and, if so, how much are they receiving? In Indiana, they found that the comparison group did receive other types of formative assessments. In the Tennessee prekindergarten study, they looked at where the comparison group went. About half of them were at home. They obviously were getting a very different experience than those who were in prekindergarten. Only about, if I remember correctly, 10 percent were in Head Start programs. In this study, there seems to be a stark contrast between what the comparison group receives and the treatment group receives.

Slide 38

You should examine moderators and mediators that may explain differential impacts of the intervention. You will want to identify them in your theory of change and how you measure them—whether you are doing exploratory or confirmatory analyses of each of these. For moderators, you may not be powered enough for wide range, so you will want to choose a small set of them that have strong, theoretical, or empirical support. The design is probably not set up to rigorously test the impact of the mediators, so you may end up doing exploratory work. For example, the Tennessee pre-K study is showing initial evidence that the program has greater impacts for non-native English speakers. In addition, they are looking at some mediators such as some of the teacher variables and classroom variables to see which are associated with more positive outcomes, again, not claiming causality.

Slide 39

In your Research Plan, you should give a detailed description of your data analysis. Describe your model, include it in equation form, explain the variables to be included and the coefficients of interest, and describe the software you will use. For the qualitative work, discuss how you are indexing, how you are summarizing and interpreting the data. Are you going to be combining the quantitative and qualitative data to be used in a single analysis? Are they going to be separate analyses informing each other? Be sure the analysis discussion flows from the description of the design. Since we are looking at students who are often in classrooms and schools, discuss how you are going to address clustering issues. Be sure to describe the analyses for subgroups—mediators and moderators and fidelity—as well as the analysis of the main impacts.

Slide 40

We mentioned a cost analysis earlier on. This analysis is to provide the cost of the program in enough detail for another state or district to use. If you'd like to go further and do cost effectiveness or cost benefit analysis that is possible.

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The “dissemination plan requirement” is new for this year. We want you to spell out how your results are going to be provided to the education agency partner as well as to other education agencies, policymakers, practitioners, and the research community (often through presentations at professional conferences and peer-reviewed journal articles); and the public. For example, in the Oregon study, the project holds a summer conference with the schools and districts taking part in the study to go over the results and plan for the next year of the study. In this way, the agency partners see the results for their schools and the other schools and use them to plan for the following year. This has led to quite a bit of interaction within the schools and among the schools concerning the interventions being used.

Slide 42

Let's discuss the last two sections, the Personnel and the Resources sections.

Slide 43

You should identify all the key personnel on the project. You are going to have a PI from the research institution and one from the education agency. IES requires that one PI who is also the project director will be the direct contact with IES and has overall responsibility for the project (including the reporting and financial requirements). This person will be called the PI and the others will be called Co-PIs. As we mentioned, the PI or Co-PI from the research institution should have expertise in doing scientific research. The PI or Co-PI from the education agency must have decisionmaking authority for the policy or program being evaluated. We don't have a preference who serves as the PI. If the main institution is going to be the education agency, that is fine. If the main institution is going to be the research institution, that is fine as well. You should choose based on who is in a better position to manage and oversee a grant.

Slide 44

What you want to show in the Personnel section is that for everything you said you are going to do on this project there is somebody who has expertise to do it, has past experience doing it, and has the time to do it. You don't need to give their professional history (e.g., every grant they have won and every project they have worked on and

every article they have published). You want to say, “For this project this person is responsible for this. This is what they have done in the past, showing they can do it. They are going to be on here X percent of the time, which is enough time to carry out their work.” That is really what you want to talk about in the Personnel section. Additionally, regarding dissemination, you may want to point out that they are good at disseminating, either within education agencies and/or in the research community.

Slide 45

For the Resources section, you should discuss the institutional resources that all partners bring to the project. What is the management structure that is going to allow this partnership to work together? If individual schools are taking part, it is helpful that they show they are willing to take part; it may not be possible, you may only be able to get a letter from the district saying, “Yes, we are going to recruit schools to take part in this.” I am just saying the more signs that implementation is occurring and the schools or the districts are willing to let the researcher come in and carry out the design the better.

If there is secondary data to be analyzed, it is important that the organization that holds that data documents their willingness to provide data. Also, if school staff will be providing information (e.g., surveys, classroom observations), you can’t get everyone to say, “I am willing to take a survey, I am willing to be observed,” but it is helpful discuss how their cooperation will be obtained and their knowledge about this project.

Slide 46

This slide shows a new section of the Request for Applications added to make sure that your application is responsive to the requirements of the Research Narrative. This section lists the minimum you need to have. As you write your application, just go through this page and ask, “Do I have each of these?” You don’t need to write anything in response to this section. You should use it as a checklist for your Research Narrative.

Slide 47

I will discuss several other sections of the application.

Slide 48

Appendix A has a page limit of 15 pages. If you are resubmitting an application, take three pages here to discuss the past reviewer comments and how you addressed them. That is very important. There is often a peer reviewer who reviewed your application the last time. If that person can come forward and say, “They did a great job of addressing our comments last time,” that is a very powerful sign to the panel. The panel takes that

very seriously. On the other hand, if they say, “They didn’t pay attention to our comments last time,” that sets a bad tone for the review and the panel discussion.

You can also include figures, charts, and any tables that supplement your Project Narrative. If they are taking up space in the main body, you can take them out and put them here, but don’t put text here, because text will be taken out. If you are going to use any measures in the evaluation and you want to show them, put them here. You can show a test, a survey, or a protocol; this is the place for those as well.

Slide 49

Appendix B has a 10-page limit. You may want to show some examples of materials used in the program or policy you are evaluating. If the intervention is using certain computer programs, you may want to show some screenshots from those programs. If it is using specific material from a curriculum, you may want to show the curriculum being used. Anything that is being used by the program/policy that you are going to study can be put here.

Slide 50

Appendix C has no page limit. This Appendix contains all the letters of agreement for your project. The more detailed these letters are, e.g., the more they say, “I understand the project’s doing this, this is my role in the project, I know I have to carry out these responsibilities,” the more confidence the panel will have that the project will succeed. There should be letters from your partners, from consultants, if possible; from the districts; from the schools; and letters from the holders of the data.

Slide 51

You will complete a Budget and a Budget Narrative. The maximum award is \$5 million. Funds can only be used for evaluation activities. They cannot be used for implementation. The maximum length of the project is 5 years. That doesn’t mean you have to apply for \$5 million for 5 years. We have a number of grant programs that are shorter and have much smaller budgets. We have projects that are under a million dollars because they focus on secondary data analysis and they are providing very useful findings. You don’t need to request the maximums to be taken seriously. It is really the content of the work you are doing on which you will be judged.

Again, the size of your award will depend on the scope of the project. Your budget narrative describes the budget items and their purpose.

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The application is due on September 4th at 4:30 p.m. and no seconds, Washington, DC time. It is time stamped by the server. If you submit after 4:30:00 p.m., you will be marked as late, and you will not be reviewed unless you document a problem with the server by calling the Grants.gov help line (a slow server, especially around the deadline, is not considered a problem).

The deadline for letters of intent has passed. If you submitted one, you will get a response. If you didn't submit one, you can still send me a description of your project if you want to get some feedback. The application package has been posted already. You can ask for a start date anytime from July 1st to September 1st. There is no reason to automatically choose the earliest start date. There may be some benefits to starting a little bit later. For example, if your school district personnel go on vacation for July, it may be better to start in August.

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The Request for Applications is on the IES funding site. A submissions guide is also posted on the IES funding site. This guide will walk you through the process of submitting the application package, so it is very helpful. I strongly suggest going in and taking a look at that. The application package is posted on Grants.gov, and this slide contains information about how to find it. I am the Program Officer, so feel free to contact me.

Slide 54

Your application will be received by the Standards & Review Office. They will first take a look to see if you met the format requirements. So, if you are over 25 pages, they will chop off any extra pages in your Research Narrative, and do the same thing for your appendices. If you are missing other forms, they may not accept it.

Then, they will do a responsiveness screening. As discussed, a special section on responsiveness was added to the Request for Applications that you can use as a checklist to prepare for the responsiveness screening. If your application is accepted for review, it will be reviewed by two to three reviewers. At least one will be an expert in your substantive area and another will be an expert in your methodology. If it is scored high enough, it will go to the full panel for discussion. Many of the panelists will be generalists regarding your project, but they will all be an expert in something. If you propose any kind of procedure—a survey, an interview, an observation—there will be somebody on the panel who knows a lot about that technique and will be expecting details on how you will carry it out. You will get an overall score, and there will be scores

on your Significance, Research Plan, Personnel, and Resources sections—the four sections of your Research Narrative.

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IES has a new online applicant notification system, and you will get an e-mail notification that the status of your award has been posted—the reviewer comments are posted there as well. You will receive a password to sign in. The majority of our applications do not receive funding on their first submission. We have no limit on resubmissions. If you do not get an award the first time but you get fairly positive comments from the peer review panel, certainly come back and talk to me about the possibilities of resubmitting and what might be the best approach for doing that.

Slide 56

Here is the funding website, where most of the information is along with my name and e-mail address. Please feel free to contact me.

Question: *“Are there any examples of successful grant applications from previous years?”*

Answer: *“On our website, you can look up the abstract on the IES website (<http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/index.asp>). It is our “Project Finder,” which lists all the projects, and if you choose “evaluation of state and local grant programs,” it will list all the projects. It will list the abstracts from the projects. There are two approaches to obtaining full applications: the fastest approach is to e-mail the project director and ask them for a copy of their application. In the past, most project directors have been willing to do that. If there is one you want to see and you can’t get any response from the project director, you can file a Freedom of Information Act request, and you will get the application that way.”*

Please feel free to e-mail me if you have follow-up questions or if you would like to discuss your research idea at some point. Thank you very much for joining me today.

This concludes today’s webinar, “Overview of the Evaluation of State & Local Education Programs & Policies, Topic 3 under 84.305H,” part of the Funding Opportunities Webinar Series. Copies of the PowerPoint presentation and a transcript from today’s webinar will be available on the IES website shortly. Thank you, and have a wonderful day.