IES Webinar - Basic Overview

Rebecca McGill-Wilkinson:
Thanks. My name is Becky McGill-Wilkinson and I'm a program officer at NCER, the National Center for Education Research. And with me also is Kimberly Sprague. She is a Program Officer at the National Center for Special Education Research. Today we're going to talk briefly about the different funding opportunities that we have at NCER and NCSER for fiscal year 2015. If you have questions you can send them to us, as Sasha just said, to WebEx Presenters using the chat function on your screen. I will pause at the end of each section of the webinar to answer any questions that have come in.

This is a diagram showing the organizational structure of the Institute of Education Sciences. You can see that under the Office of the Director we have four centers: the National Center for Education Evaluation is responsible for things like the regional education laboratories and the What Works Clearinghouse, you might be familiar with them; the National Center for Education Statistics is responsible for the NAEP and other assessments and statistics; and the two centers that we'll be talking about today are the research centers, the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research. The two do much of the same work, but the focus of the National Center for Special Education Research is on special education.

NCER supports rigorous research that addresses education needs from early childhood to adult education. NCSER sponsors rigorous and comprehensive research on special education, which is designed to expand the knowledge and understanding for infants, toddlers, and students at risk with or at-risk for disabilities from birth through high school.

These are the research objectives of the IES Grant Programs. The first objective is to develop or identify education interventions that enhance academic achievements and that can be widely deployed. By interventions, we mean anything from practices to programs to policies. They could be curricula, they could be instructional materials; all those things would count as an intervention.

Another research objective is to identify what does not work in education, and thereby encourage innovation and further research. And finally, an objective is to understand the processes that underlie the effectiveness of interventions and the variation in their effectiveness. So in other words, not just what works and what doesn't work, but also when it works or when it doesn't work, who it works for, who it doesn't work for.

This slide shows all of NCER's investments separated by competition between 2002 and 2013. As you can see our largest investment both in the number of awards and in the number of dollars is the Education Research Grants Competition which will also be a big topic of the webinar today. We also have research and development centers, which are totaling just under $205 million. You can see, though, that's only 20 awards. Those are larger awards in terms of dollar amounts. We will also talk briefly about that today.

We will briefly talk about post-doctoral and pre-doctoral researcher training. We will talk about research-practitioner partnerships and statistical and research methodology, which are all smaller programs than our Education Research Program. The NCSER investment by competition -- this is between 2006 and 2013. It's between 2006 and 2013 because the National Center for Special Education Research is four years younger than the National Center for Education Research so this started in 2006. Again, the Special Education Research Program, the main research grant program is also the largest at NCSER in terms of both the number of awards and the total investment. NCSER also has research and development centers though we won't be talking about that today. We will be talking about the early career development and mentoring training as that's a competition that's happening in 2015.

I'm going to give you a brief overview of the 2015 funding opportunities. We're going to go through them relatively quickly and then we're going to go through them in more depth, so this is just an overview of what you're going to hear as we go along.

First we'll talk about the Education Research Program and the Special Education Research Program. These are our main research programs. We will also talk about the NCER Education Research and Development centers; the NCER Statistical and Research Methodology and Education Program; and the NCER Partnerships and Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice and Policy.

Finally, in terms of training we are running a number of training programs for 2015: the NCER Research Training Grant Programs in the Education Sciences which includes pre-doc, post-doc, and methods training. We will also talk about NCSER's Research Training Program in Special Education which is the Early Career Development and Mentoring.

There are a number of ways to identify a funding opportunity. The first way is to start at the IES website. Given that you registered for the webinar, you've probably already been to the IES website but if you have not, you can find it at ies.ed.gov/funding, which will take you to the funding page on the IES website. You can also sign up for the IES NewsFlash which means that when we release new funding opportunities as well as when we schedule webinars and various conferences and trainings, you will get an email in your inbox telling you about the opportunity. All of our funding opportunities are announced in the Federal Register. Our Federal Register announcements for 2015 came out in March. You want to review the Requests for Applications that are on the funding website. We also recommend that you contact the Program Officer for the topic that you're interested in at the relevant center. The contact information for the program officers is both on the IES website and in the RFA at the beginning of the topic and at the end of the RFA.

Just to show you what these websites look like, this is how you get to the Funding Opportunities website from the main IES website. You click on Funding Opportunities there in the red circle and it will take you to a page that looks like this. This page tells you the steps to apply for IES grants, and you'll notice number three it says "download the appropriate Request for Applications." You would click on that link that says 'Request for Applications' and it takes you to a whole list of all of the RFAs which we have both as Word documents and as PDFs. If you want to sign up for the IES NewsFlash -- which I recommend that you do, because there's a lot

of information that could be useful -- under 'News and Events' on the IES website, you click on NewsFlash, and it takes you to a page that looks like this where you enter your email address and then you can select which areas you're interested in from the list and then you'll only get emails that will be relevant for you.

To identify the appropriate grant program, you want to read the Request for Applications. Again, those are on the IES website so I recommend that if you haven't already, that you download the Request for Applications and that you take an opportunity to read it. You'll also want to make sure that you review the topics and the methodological requirements. We're going to go over these briefly today, but definitely refer back to your Request for Applications for more information. You can also read abstracts of projects we have already funded under any research topic or program. Those are on our website, and there is a search function right on the IES web page so you could enter keywords also. If you wanted to look only for projects that were very specific about a certain topic, you could do it that way.

Under our NCER Education Research Grant Program, we fund research on a variety of topics, including cognition in student learning, education technology, effective teachers and effective teaching, reading and writing. Hopefully the work that you are interested in doing will fit into one of these topics. In order to apply for a grant, you will need to choose and identify one of these specific topics.

We also have special education research topics which in some ways are very similar to the NCER topics. Here there's also a cognition and student learning in special education. There's also reading, writing and language development. There are some different topics under NCSER including autism spectrum disorders, families of children with disabilities, and transition outcomes for secondary students with disabilities.

When you apply to either 84.305A or 84.324A, the Research Grant Programs, you have to choose a topic and you also have to choose a goal. We have five goals which we'll go through one at a time, but they are: Exploration; Development and Innovation; Efficacy and Replication; Effectiveness; and Measurement.

The Exploration Goal, which we call Goal One, is meant to explore associations between malleable factors and education outcomes. By malleable factors we mean those factors that are in the control of the education system. That could be anything from instruction to what books are available to the students in the classroom. The purpose of an Exploration Goal is also to identify factors and conditions that may mediate or moderate the associations between malleable factors and student outcomes. You can use a variety of methodological approaches under Exploration; you can use secondary data analysis, you can collect primary data, you can do a meta-analysis, or you can do some combination of the three.

Goal Two is Development and Innovation. The purpose of a Development and Innovation grant is to develop an intervention. Again, an intervention could be a curriculum, it could be an instructional approach, a program, or a policy. The purpose is to develop an intervention or to improve an existing education intervention. Note here that the development part or the revision part is really important. This isn't a project just to do a pilot study, there actually has to be a

substantial amount of development work. That development must be iterative, meaning that you need to work a little on development and then test it out to see how it works, and then work a little more, and then make revisions as you go along based on the feedback and the data that you're collecting. In addition to the development part of this grant, you also need to collect data on the feasibility, usability, and fidelity of implementation of the intervention in an actual education setting. You need to collect pilot data on student outcomes that shows whether or not the intervention has promise for impacting student outcomes.

We have one question which I'm going to pause to answer and the question is, would a formative assessment be considered an intervention? It depends –on whether it can be considered an intervention. I'm assuming that by formative you mean that the data that would come out of the assessment could be used to make improvements, to make changes to teaching or to help students who need additional help, something like that. It could go either to Development and Innovation, or it could go to Measurement, which is Goal Five and we will get to that. If you still have questions after we've covered Goal Five, then it would be useful to contact your program officer to talk about your project specifically because the decision about which goal in that case will be project specific.

Efficacy and Replication is Goal Three, and you have four options under Efficacy and Replication: it's a project to evaluate whether or not a fully developed intervention is efficacious under limited or ideal conditions. Or it's a project to replicate an efficacious intervention, varying the original conditions. You can also propose to gather follow-up data examining the longer-term effects of an intervention that already demonstrated efficacy. Or you can analyze retrospective or historical secondary data to test an intervention that's been implemented in the past. Under Efficacy and Replication, the intervention must be fully developed, so you can't do development work under Efficacy and Replication. You can implement the intervention under ideal or routine conditions, and it needs to be implemented by the end user in an authentic education setting.

A couple more notes about the Efficacy and Replication Goal which are new this year: you need to include a cost analysis and you need to include a data management plan. Your cost analysis should outline the cost of implementing the intervention for a school or district, including cost for personnel, training, materials, etc.. The cost analysis should be done annually, because start-up costs the first year might be different from maintenance costs in follow-up years. You may also do a cost analysis showing the cost of implementing your comparison intervention so that you can show a comparison in the cost as well. Please note that we are not asking for an economic evaluation such as a cost-benefit analysis but you could propose to do that if you would like to.

The data management plan is limited to five pages and it goes in Appendix E. There's a lot of information in your RFA on the data management plan, but just briefly it should outline the type of data to be shared, the procedures for maintaining confidentiality, the expected schedule for data access, the final format of the dataset, and any circumstances that would prevent some or all of the data from being made accessible. Those are just some of the things that need to go into the data management plan so make sure that you read your RFA and that you include all of the requirements for that section.

Quick question: are there templates available to use for cost analysis and data management plan? No there are not, we don't have templates. The RFA includes the components that are required for those parts, and if you have further questions you should contact your program officer who should be able to help you with either the cost analysis or the data management plan, or both.

We did get one more question about efficacy grants. The question is: Can you apply for an efficacy study for an intervention in which you or your institution has a financial stake? For a Goal Four Effectiveness study, you would not be able to apply if you have a stake in the intervention. You wouldn't be able to apply as the prime award. You may be able to serve as a consultant, but the application would need to be really, really clear about the plan for reducing any potential conflict of interest.

For an Efficacy study, we don't have the same requirement for developers and others who have a stake in the intervention. There is no reason you can't be involved. However, it is still very important that the applicant outlines the plan for reducing conflict of interest or the potential for conflict of interest. Some ways to do that are to keep the data analysis separate so that the developers, for instance, are not involved in data analysis. Another way to do that is to make sure that the developers are not involved in the randomization for the students, for example, and that they're blind to conditions. Those are some steps that you could take. If you have other questions, you should contact your program officer, and he or she can help walk you through some more information about how to reduce that conflict of interest. Because even though it is not a requirement, the reviewers will want to see that you have a plan for making sure that there isn't bias in the study.

Goal Four we call the Effectiveness Goal. The purpose of this project is to evaluate whether a fully developed intervention that has evidence of efficacy is effective when implemented under typical conditions through an independent evaluation. Before you submit an Effectiveness Goal, at least two efficacy studies of the intervention have to have been carried out, and have to have shown beneficial and practical impact on student outcomes. That doesn't mean that you have to have been the one to do the two efficacy studies. The two efficacy studies also don't have to be funded by IES, but there do have to be two prior efficacy studies. In a Goal Four, the intervention should be implemented by the end user under routine conditions, and your project team must be independent of the interventions. In other words, it's okay to have developers of interventions as consultants, for example, but they should not be part of the evaluation team. Just as with Efficacy and Replication, you also need to include a cost analysis and a data management plan.

One more question about the Effectiveness Goal. Can you revisit what's meant by implemented by end user under routine conditions and project team must be independent of intervention? The first point under the Effectiveness goal is that it must be implemented by the end user under routine conditions. What we mean is that, if it's an intervention, let's say a curriculum that is meant to be implemented in the classroom by the teacher, then the teachers should be the ones implementing the intervention in your study, as opposed to a team of graduate students that you have hired to work on the project.

What we mean by the project team must be independent of the intervention, this is what we talked about a little bit already in terms of the developer of the intervention, people who have a financial stake in the intervention -- those people should not be involved in the main research team. You want to make sure that the reviewers understand that there isn't a potential for a conflict of interest or bias as a result of the study.

Measurement is the last goal. The purpose of a Measurement Goal is to develop new assessments or refine existing assessments, and then validate those assessments, or, to validate existing assessments for specific purposes, contexts, and population. As you'll note here, validation is an important aspect of this goal in either situation, so you can develop and validate or you can just validate. You need to include a rationale for the new assessment or the refinement. In other words, how is the measure or assessment that you are proposing different from assessments that already exist? The Institute intends for the measurement goal to result in a well-specified assessment framework, which includes operational definitions of constructs, a theoretical model showing the relation of the constructs to each other, a description of how the assessment provides evidence of the constructs, and a description of the indented use and population.

A couple of things to note this year for all goals: first is the dissemination plan. The dissemination plan was in our RFA this last year for 2014, but this year it's a requirement so you want to make sure you pay special attention to this. Your dissemination plan should include the different audiences to which you will disseminate. You should outline the different publications and presentations and reports that you think you will want to produce. You want to make sure that you include education agencies and schools that provided the data. So if you're working in a school and you're working with the students, you want to make sure that you have a plan for disseminating findings to that school. You also want to make sure that you're thinking about non-researchers, practitioners and policy makers and how you'll disseminate information to them. Make sure that you read your RFA under dissemination plan to get more details about that. The other thing you should pay attention to is that the materials that go into each appendix this year have shifted, so refer to your RFA and make sure what you're putting in each appendix is correct.

These are the maximum award amounts for the various types of goals. Note that for Exploration, Efficacy and Replication, and Effectiveness, there are different maximums of time and money depending on what kind of study you're doing. Note that the dollar amounts are the maximum for indirect and direct. Finally, these maximums are very strict. If you request more time or more money than is indicated as the maximum for the goal that you choose, then your application will not be forwarded for peer review. One more question just came in: How does the number of proposals typically breakdown by goal? We don't have the data on the number of proposals that broken down by goal. The number of applications we fund under each goal is likely proportional to the number of applications we receive We have funded the smallest number of Goal Fours.

Kimberly Sprague:
I believe Goal Two is the largest.

Rebecca McGill-Wilkinson:
Yes, the Development and Innovation Goal is the largest for both centers. I think the other three fall in between.

Now, we're going to go over the other 2015 research programs that we have beyond the Education Research and the Special Education Research Programs. The first thing that we'll talk about is the Research Training Programs for NCER. These are under the programs 84.305B, and this year we are competing three: We are competing the Predoctoral Interdisciplinary Research Training Program, the Postdoctoral Research Training Program, and the Methods Training for Education Researchers.

The Predoctoral Training Program is for institutions to create cohesive, graduate training programs. The goal here is for each program to involve a number of different disciplines, hence the reason we call it The Interdisciplinary Training Program. The Postdoctoral Research Program is meant for institutions to establish postdoctoral training programs; to train researchers in the skills that are necessary to conduct the type of research that the Institute funds. These programs are meant to help train graduate students in education with the methodological skills as well as other skills that we look for in our research grants. The Research Training Program in Special Education, 84.324B, is the Early Career Development and Mentoring Program. This is meant for those investigators who are within three years of their doctorate or post-doctoral work. It's meant to provide support to further develop their methodological, content, and grant writing expertise. This involves working with a mentor. When you apply for an Early Career Development and Mentoring grant, you are required to submit both a research plan and a career development plan.

In 2015 we are also competing three Research and Development Centers at NCER. I'm going to through these each one at a time. We're competing Knowledge Utilization, Standards in Schools, and Virtual Learning. The Knowledge Utilization R&D Center is meant to explore how and when practitioners use research evidence to make decisions, and to explore how education research can be made more relevant to practitioners. The focus of this center is on how research is or isn't used in classrooms and schools and how we can increase the amount of research that is used in those settings.

The Standards in Schools R&D center is focused on this idea that states across the country are adopting and implementing new standards for college and career readiness. For example, the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards are only one version of college and career ready standards, although they are perhaps the most common. There are other college and career ready standards. This competition is not meant to limit researchers to only to the Common Core, but to any college and career ready standards. The purpose of the grant will be to explore how K-12 schools and teachers are responding to the new standards and what these standards might mean for students.

Finally, we are competing the Virtual Leaning R&D Center. This is meant to support research on, and the evaluation of, instructional practices, content, and learning tools within widely used online instructional delivery platforms. It's also meant to explore how the large amount of data

that's generated by the platforms can be used to address the needs and questions of both practitioners and researchers. If you have more questions about the R&D Center, there will be another webinar on June 10 that will go over each of those three centers in more depth.

Next we'll talk about the Statistical and Research Methodology in Education program, which through NCER. This is intended to fund research projects that expand and improve the methodological and statistical tools available for education researchers. The tools are intended to be used to improve the design of research studies, the analysis of research data, and the interpretation of research findings. Keep in mind that we also have a special topic for early career projects. For those of you are early in your career, you can apply for Early Career Statistical and Research Methodology and Education grant. You should look at the RFA to see what we mean by early career.

Finally, the Partnership and Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice and Policy. This RFA has three topics, which we're going to go through one at a time: Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education; Continuous Improvement Research in Education; and Evaluation of State and Local Educational Programs and Policies. The Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships are meant to support partnerships that are composed of research institutions and state or local education agencies. Before you apply for one of these grants, the partners need to have worked together to have identified an education problem of high priority for the education agency, and that has important implications for student outcomes.

When you apply, you need to be able to talk about the education problem or issue that you identified. The grant is meant to support the partnership's development of a research plan and this grant program is for new or existing partnerships. The Continuous Improvement Research in Education grant program is meant to support partnerships between research institutions and state or local education agencies to address specific education problems of high priority for the education agency that have important implications for student outcomes. This is for existing, well-established partnerships, not new partnerships. The purpose of this grant is to implement, adapt, and revise an approach to addressing the issue or problem.

Finally, the Evaluation of State and Local Education Programs and Policies grant program supports the evaluation of education programs or policies that are paid for and implemented by state or local education agencies. These evaluations are meant to determine both the overall impact of the programs or policies and the impact across a variety of conditions. Here are the award parameters for all of those competitions that we just discussed, including the maximum number of years and the maximum award direct and indirect, which include both direct and indirect.

Now let's assume that you've decided you want to apply for an IES grant. What do you do next?

First, you should read the RFA. Next, you should contact the program officer. The program officers at NCER and NCSER can offer guidance and technical assistance in helping you prepare your application. They are associated with competitions and/or topics, and, as I've said before, their contact information is included at the end of each RFA. The contact information is also on the program pages on the IES website. If you are not sure which program you should be

applying to, or which topic, or which goal, reach out to one of the program officers and they can help you figure out which program or which topic to apply to.

There are some documents that you need to submit your application. The first is the Request for Applications. This year, the application submission guide is included as part of the RFA.
You will also need the application package. There is a separate application package for each Request for Applications and they will be available starting on June 5 at www.grants.gov. If you have specific questions about the application package (how to use it, all the forms and what do with them), I recommend you sign up for one of our application process webinars which will go through the entire application package. You can find out when the webinar is scheduled and you can register on the IES website.

This is what the grants.gov website looks like. This is where you are going to go to find your application package.
Important dates and deadlines: The application is due on August 7 at 4:30 p.m. and 0 seconds, D.C. time. That's Eastern Daylight Time. 4:30 p.m. and 0 seconds. If it comes in at 4:30 p.m. and two seconds or one second, it is considered late. Again, that's Washington, D.C. time. So, if you are not on East Coast time, make sure that you make a note to yourself that this is East Coast time. All of this information is on the cover of your RFA but we just wanted to remind you of it again. Letters of Intent are due on June 5, 2014. The application package is going to be posted on June 5 also. If your application is funded, you can start the project anywhere between July 1 and September 1 of 2015.

We strongly encourage you to submit a Letter of Intent, and there are two main reasons. The first is that this will open the door for the program officer to contact you to offer assistance. When you submit your LOI, the program officer will send you an email and offer you technical assistance and to help you with your application. The LOI is also encouraged because it's used identify the expertise that's needed for the peer review panel and to make sure there are a sufficient number of reviewers.

Keep in mind that Letters of Intent are non-binding, meaning you can submit a Letter of Intent and not submit an application. You can also submit a Letter of Intent and change your mind completely about what the project will be. The Letter of Intent is also not used in the review process; the peer reviewers will never see your letter of intent. They are only used internally at IES. If you miss the deadline for Letter of Intent, you should contact the program officer to let him or her know that you intend to submit even through you didn't submit an LOI.

We went over this once before, but we're going to say it again because it is really important. We accept applications once a year. This year, applications are due August 7 at 4:30 p.m. and 0 seconds, Eastern Daylight Time. We do not accept late applications. The authorized representative at your institution, not you, the principal investigator, is the one who actually submits the grants through grants.gov. Again, if you have more questions about submitting your application, I recommend you sign up for the application process webinar.

All applications that are submitted to IES are reviewed for compliance and also responsiveness to the RFA. Those applications that are compliant and responsive are assigned to a review panel. Two or three of those review panel members conduct a primary review of each application. Those applications that are deemed to be the most competitive after those two or three panel members conduct the primary review will move on to the full panel. At the panel meeting, when the panel members actually come together, the most competitive application are reviewed and scored by the full panel.

If you have more questions about the peer review process, there is information on the IES website under the Standards and Review Office, and there is a document on the Standards and Review Office website that outlines in much greater detail the peer review process. The SRO website, which is on the IES website, also has a list of panel members from prior years.

In terms of notification, all applicants will receive an email notification that information is available on the Applicant Notification System. When there is a change in the status of your award or, there is a peer reviewer summary statement available through the Applicant Notification System you will receive an email that you can log in and look at the status or the summary statement.

If you are not granted an award the first time, you should consider resubmitting and talking with your program officer. Most grants are not funded the first time.

This is the Resources for Researchers page on the IES website. I just wanted to put it up here because this is a good place for you to go after this webinar to get even more information about all the things that we talked about. As you can see, you can sign up for new webinars and you can also look at old webinars. We have some methodological resources and video presentations. You can also get to the information about the peer review process right from this page, as well as information about public access to research and how you can find out more about funded research.

We have a question about peer review. Do the same two or three reviewers review all the applications for a particular category of funding? The way it works is that the panel has many members. Many more than two or three. How many members the panel has will depend on how many applications come in. That's why you should submit your LOI, so that we make sure we have enough reviewers. And then each reviewer will serve as a primary reviewer for a certain number of them, usually about eight.

Each of them will read eight, so it's not the same two or three people that review all of them. They're distributed among the panel members.

Kimberly Sprague:
If it's a resubmission, the Standards and Review Office does try to have the prior reviewer review the resubmission of the application, if possible.

Just a couple of reminders: make sure you read you Request for Applications carefully, they are all on the website. Call or email your program officer as early in the process as possible.

As time permits, your program officer may be able to review a draft of your proposal and provide feedback. You should contact your program officer to find out his or her due date for drafts because each program officer will set that date themselves. Remember when you submit an LOI and you haven't had a chance to reach out to your program officer yet, the program officer will contact you after you send in the LOI.

Don't be afraid to contact us! Here are Kim and my contact information, and you should feel free to email either of us if you have any questions, and don't forget the IES funding opportunities website.

Thanks very much.

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