REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Chronically Low-Performing Schools
Research Initiative
CFDA Number: 84.305G

COMPETITION ROUND	OCTOBER
Letter of Intent Due Date (https://ies.constellagroup.com/)	08/03/2009
Application Package Available (http://www.grants.gov/)	08/03/2009
Application Due Date (http://www.grants.gov/)	10/01/2009

PART I GENERAL OVERVIEW

1. REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS
In this announcement, the Institute of Education Sciences (Institute) requests applications for research projects that will contribute to its Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative. The Institute will consider only applications that meet the requirements outlined below under Part II Requirements of the Proposed Research.

Separate funding announcements are available on the Institute's website that pertain to the other research and research training grant programs funded through the Institute's National Center for Education Research and to the discretionary grant competitions funded through the Institute's National Center for Special Education Research (http://ies.ed.gov/funding).

2. BACKGROUND
At the core of many efforts to reform education in our country are initiatives to improve the subset of American public schools that are chronically low-performing schools – schools that bring down the average levels of performance of U.S. schools and underscore inequalities in educational outcomes. Decades of education reform have acknowledged chronically low-performing schools, implicitly and explicitly, ranging from Title I to comprehensive school reform to charter school laws. Interventions to address chronically low-performing schools have varied dramatically, from providing extra funding and support to low-performing schools to exposing them via high-profile accountability policies to providing "escape valves" through school choice policies. Despite multiple attempts to improve them, chronically low-performing schools remain, in large part because these schools have little evidence-based guidance on what strategies will be most effective given their particular challenges and, in some cases, they lack the capacity to implement strategies that have been found to be effective. However, recent research has highlighted several areas in which low-performing schools face specific challenges that are potentially amenable to interventions.[1]

Although low performance can be marked in a number of ways, in general these schools suffer from persistently low levels of achievement. Student achievement can also be measured in different ways. One of these ways, chosen for illustrative purposes only, is the drop-out level in secondary schools. Arguably one of the most important measures of a school's effectiveness is its ability to keep students on track to graduate high school on time. In 2005–06 the nation's Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR is an estimate of the percentage of a freshman class that graduates four years later) was 73 percent; however, this figure varied considerably across the country.[2] For example, among the largest 100 school districts in the United States, this rate ranged from a low of 43 percent in Cleveland City schools to a high of 98 percent in Alpine, Utah.[3] Of the five largest districts in the United States, four had AFGR of 55 percent or below (New York City, Los Angeles Unified, Chicago and Dade County, Florida). Furthermore, an examination of the class of 2002 found close to half (46 percent) of African American high school students and more than one-third (39 percent) of Latino students attended high schools where they faced a 50 percent chance of graduating on time.[4] In order to better guide policymakers in developing solutions, researchers have been working to identify the key factors responsible for drop-out. For example, research on Chicago public schools has shown that academic success in the ninth grade is

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[1] See Jacob, B. and Ludwig, J. (2008). *Improving Educational Outcomes for Poor Children*. Cambridge, MA: NBER Working Paper No. 14550.

[2] Stillwell, R. and Hoffman, L. (2009). Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2005-06. First Look. NCES 2008-353. Retrieved 27 April 2009] from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008353rev.pdf.

[3] Garofano, A. and Sable, J. (2008). *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2005–06* (NCES 2008-339). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

[4] Balfanz, R. and Letgers, N. (2004). *Locating the Dropout Crisis*. Baltimore, MD: Center for the Education of Students Placed at Risk Report No. 70.

critical for students' progress towards high school graduation.[5] This line of research has uncovered factors that are related to high school drop-out, such as course failures and credit accumulation in the ninth grade, leading researchers to develop an on-track indicator that can be used to identify students who are at risk of dropping out. A next step would be to develop and test interventions that target those students who are identified as being at-risk for dropping out.

To increase research efforts to improve chronically low-performing schools, the Institute is launching its Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative (Low-Performing Schools Initiative). For the Low-Performing Schools Initiative, the Institute invites applications to develop interventions that target specific problems faced by chronically low-performing schools and test the promise of strategies for successfully addressing those problems within a relatively short time period. Over the five-year project period, grantees will be expected to develop and test a number of practices that principals of low-performing schools, with support from their district, could implement to improve their schools. The Institute views this approach as distinct from comprehensive school reform strategies. That is, the purpose of this initiative is not to generate a single approach to simultaneously address all of the problems that a low-performing school faces. Rather, the purpose of this research initiative is to systematically develop and test practices that could form a menu of practices that principals, with support from their district (or districts with the support of their principals), could choose from to target specific challenges in their persistently low-performing schools. The Institute realizes that chronically low-performing schools may require more than the strategies developed and piloted under this Initiative to fully address the causes of their persistent low performance. At the same time, the Institute recognizes that districts and principals often do not have access to research-based practices to address specific problems in their low-performing schools. By developing a set of such practices, this Initiative seeks to provide them with such options.

Although the Institute has supported research on programs, practices, and policies to improve school performance through its research programs on Middle and High School Reform and Education Policy, Finance, and Systems, the Low-Performing Schools Initiative differs from these programs in its sole focus on schools that are persistently low performing and in its structure and requirements. These differences are due to the importance of the issue, and the multiple and seemingly intractable difficulties that must be overcome to successfully address it. To improve the likelihood of developing strategies that can help improve chronically low-performing schools, the initiative includes: (a) a requirement to closely collaborate with districts and low-performing schools in the development of the strategies in order to address the specific obstacles faced by and opportunities available to the schools involved; (b) funding for development of strategies and their promise for improving school performance, but not for group impact evaluations of them, in order to focus efforts on strategy development which may require many iterations; (c) a five-year project length in order to provide more time to address the difficult obstacles faced by such schools; and (d) inter-project meetings to support the transfer of ideas on overcoming these obstacles.

PART II REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

3. BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

Applicants may submit proposals to more than one of the Institute's FY 2010 competitions. However, applicants may submit a given proposal only once (i.e., applicants may not submit the same proposal or very similar proposals to multiple competitions). If the Institute determines prior to panel review that an applicant has submitted the same proposal or very similar proposals to multiple competitions and the proposal is judged to be compliant and responsive to the submission rules and requirements described in the Request for Applications, the Institute will select one version of the application to be reviewed by the appropriate scientific review panel. If the Institute determines after panel review that an applicant has

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[5] Allensworth, E., and Easton, J. (2005). *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

submitted the same proposal or very similar proposals to multiple competitions and if the proposal is determined to be worthy of funding, the Institute will select the topic under which the proposal will be funded.

4. SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS
A. Overview of the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative Projects
For the Low-Performing Schools Initiative, each research team will focus on at least two specific problems faced by chronically low-performing schools by developing and testing the promise of practices to address these problems. The long-term outcomes of this research program will be a better understanding of the processes that contribute to low-performing schools, diagnostic frameworks that principals or districts could use to identify specific problems within their low-performing schools, and an array of practices for improving low-performing schools. The practices are those that could be implemented by a principal of a low-performing school or by a district in conjunction with the principals of low-performing schools.

The FY 2010 competition focuses on development and initial testing of the promise of practices for improving low-performing schools. Each grantee will be expected to develop and test the promise of specific practices for addressing at least two distinct problems of low-performing schools.

To foster exchange among the research teams involved in the Low-Performing Schools Initiative, grantees will meet twice each year in Washington, D.C. to discuss their projects and what they are learning in addition to also attending the annual IES research conference.

Finally, a critical aspect of this initiative is the contributions of school and district partners on each research team. Too often researchers develop their interventions without collaborating with district and school personnel who have intimate knowledge of the capacity, constraints, and challenges of teachers, principals, and district staff. A requirement of the Low-Performing Schools Initiative is the inclusion of school and district staff on each research team.

B. Significance of the Project
Applicants address the significance of the project by: (a) presenting a theoretical and empirical rationale for understanding chronically low-performing schools and operationalizing it into a detailed diagnostic framework for evaluating the contributing factors to low performance that is grounded in both theory and data; (b) identifying and justifying at least two specific problems that will be the focus of the proposed project including the contribution solving these problems might make to improving school performance; and (c) describing an example of a practice that might be employed to address one of these problems along with the theory of change underlying the use of the practice.

a. Rationale and diagnostic framework
Applicants must present a compelling theoretical and empirical rationale for understanding chronically low-performing schools. One way to think about this is as developing a model of why chronically-low performing schools are unsuccessful at educating their students (or subgroups of their students) to on-grade levels of achievement (or similarly a model of the process by which well-performing schools achieve this outcome and where chronically low-performing school differ in the process). This model will act as a diagnostic framework to help identify the key problem points in the inputs and process of chronically low-performing schools that might be addressed through the development and implementation of specific practices. Applicants should draw upon existing research and theory to develop the conceptual underpinnings of such a model which can then be operationalized as a diagnostic framework for identifying potential targets for intervening in chronically low-performing schools. Because it is likely that multiple factors contribute to the persistent nature of low performance in these schools, applicants should attempt to develop a comprehensive diagnostic framework that can be used to evaluate a chronically low-performing school. One product of the projects funded through the Low-Performing Schools Initiative will be a diagnostic framework that can be used by school leaders to identify specific problems in their low-performing schools that need to be addressed to improve school performance.

b. Identifying two specific problems

Based on the diagnostic framework, applicants should identify two key problem areas that are preventing chronically low-performing schools from successfully educating all of their students. These areas are to be the focus of the interventions to be developed. Their role and importance in the schools' persistent low performance should be detailed. The potential impacts of partly and fully solving them should be discussed using both theoretical and empirical justifications.

c. Describing one practice

Applicants must propose an example of an intervention strategy to be developed that would target one of the two specific problems of low-performing schools identified in b. This strategy may be made up of one or a number of specific practices and example practices should be described in detail. Over the course of the five-year project, grantees will be expected to develop and test the promise of practices to address at least two distinct problems. However, for the purpose of the proposal, applicants need only describe the strategy and specific practices to be developed to address one problem.

Applicants should clearly describe the strategy, the intervention practices and the theory of change for the intervention. For example, how do the features or components of the intervention relate to each other temporally (or operationally), pedagogically, and theoretically (e.g., why A leads to B)? Applicants should provide a strong theoretical and empirical justification for the design and sequencing of the features or components of the intervention. When applicants clearly describe the theory of change that guides the intervention and the specific features making up the intervention, reviewers are better able to evaluate (a) the relation between the intervention and its theoretical and empirical foundation (e.g., is the proposed intervention a reasonable operationalization of the theory?) and (b) the relation between the intervention and the outcome measures (e.g., do the proposed measures tap the constructs that the intervention is intended to address?).

Applicants should explain *why* the proposed intervention is likely to produce substantially better student outcomes relative to current practice. Applicants should contrast the proposed intervention to typical existing practices. A comparison of the proposed intervention with typical practice helps reviewers determine if the proposed intervention has the potential to produce substantially better student outcomes because it is sufficiently different from current practices and has "active ingredients" that appear on the basis of theoretical or empirical reasons to be powerful agents for improving the outcomes of interest. This comparison with current practice can also be made using the diagnostic framework developed for chronically low-performing schools in order to answer such questions as: (a) what is the theory of action underlying the typical practice; (b) what are the assumptions behind the expected impact of the typical practice; (c) why has the typical practice not succeeded in chronically low-performing schools; and (d) why would the proposed practice be expected to succeed where the typical practice has not.

C. Methodological Requirements

The primary purpose of the Low-Performing Schools Initiative is to develop and test the promise of interventions for improving low-performing schools. Applicants must clearly address the proposed methods for developing interventions and testing the *promise* of these interventions for improving low-performing schools. Applicants should describe the systematic process they will use to collect empirical data that will provide feedback for refining the intervention. A major objective of each project is to refine and improve upon the initial version of the intervention by implementing it (or components of it), observing its functioning, and making necessary adjustments in its design so that it functions as intended.

Strong applications include clear descriptions of the development activities so that reviewers will understand (a) what will be developed and (b) how it will be developed. Applicants should describe what they would measure or observe to determine whether the intervention is working as intended when they are testing the feasibility of successive versions of the intervention. A useful by-product of such testing is

a set of fidelity of implementation measures that could be used if the intervention were evaluated in an efficacy trial using group designs.

a. Sample of chronically low-performing schools and district context

Researchers applying to the Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative must partner with one or more school districts that have chronically low-performing schools. The applicant should identify the low-performing schools that will participate in the project and describe the characteristics of these schools (e.g., characteristics of the students and staff) as well as the characteristics of the district that will be involved in the proposed research project. Applicants should clearly state and justify their criteria for identifying low performing schools and demonstrate that it applies to the schools taking part in the project. (Although not required, applicants may also provide school and district-level data showing how the selected schools fit within the diagnostic framework and use this information to support the choice of the problems to be addressed by the project.)

b. Iterative development process

Applicants should describe the iterative development process to be used in the design and refinement of the proposed intervention, and plans for acquiring evidence about the operation of the intervention according to the theory of change that they describe. The number of times a component or intervention is revised, implemented, observed, and revised depends on the complexity of the intervention and its implementation. Applicants should explain (a) how they define "operating as intended" for the proposed intervention; (b) what data they will collect to determine how the intervention (or component) is operating; (c) how they will use the data they collect to revise the intervention; and (d) what criteria they will use to determine if the intervention (or component) operates as intended.

As part of the development process, applicants should attend to the feasibility of implementation of the intervention within low-performing schools. Feasibility of implementation might be addressed, for example, with evidence demonstrating that the intervention can be implemented with fidelity in low-performing schools. As part of the iterative development process, applicants should explain what data they will collect about the feasibility of implementation and how they will use the collected data to revise the intervention.

A timeline that delineates the iterative process of drafting and revising the intervention (e.g., features or components of the intervention, procedures, training activities, and materials) is often a helpful way of showing reviewers how research activities will feed into subsequent development (refinement) activities, so that information can be used to make decisions and improvements. A variety of methodological strategies may be employed during this phase.

c. Testing the promise of the proposed intervention

Applicants must provide a detailed research plan for testing the promise of proposed intervention strategies. Because grantees will be expected to develop, refine, and test the promise of multiple strategies for improving low-performing schools, the Institute does *not* intend to fund efficacy evaluations of interventions using group designs as part of the FY 2010 competition for the Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative. As an example of a possible strategy for obtaining evidence of the promise of the proposed strategies, the Institute suggests that researchers consider conducting single subject experimental designs, such as those used in special education research to evaluate the effects of interventions for low-incidence disabilities, in which each school is considered to be a single case.[6]

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[6] For an example of the application of a multiple-baseline approach to the evaluation of a classroom intervention, see Benedict, E.A., Horner, R. H., & Squires, J. K (2007). Assessment and implementation of Positive Behavior Support in preschools. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 27* (3), 174—192. Please note, however, that in this study analysis was by visual inspection. The Institute encourages researchers to incorporate statistical analyses in their single-case designs.

Example. For illustrative purposes, suppose an applicant decides to target improving attendance as a key step in improving performance in low-performing high schools and proposes an attendance intervention. The applicant might propose a multiple baseline study, which is essentially an interrupted time series with replication. In this example, the applicant proposes to implement the intervention for ninth-grade students in School A. Attendance is monitored for several weeks prior to the implementation of the intervention for all students in Schools A through G, and during the 9-week implementation of the ninth-grade attendance intervention in School A. The research team hypothesizes that they will see improvement in attendance among ninth-graders in School A but not for students in other grades in School A and not for ninth-grade students (or other students) in Schools B through G. Alternately, if the success of the intervention is premised on its implementation at the start of the school year, the applicant can propose comparing attendance after implementation to ninth-grade attendance during the corresponding time period from the previous school year (or years) as well as to attendance by the other grades in School A and by ninth-graders in Schools B through G during the implementation year. If an improvement is obtained for ninth graders in School A (and not in other schools), the researchers could propose to implement the intervention for ninth graders in School B for the next 9-week period, at a more appropriate time during the same school year, or at the beginning of the next school year.

Continuing this example, the research team could also propose to concurrently test an intervention to improve classroom administrative routines in ways that free up more time for instruction. In this case, the challenge is to increase instructional time and the intervention consists of strategies to make non-instructional routines more efficient. During the same 9-week period in which School A implements the ninth-grade attendance intervention, the research team could test the intervention to increase the efficiency of administrative routines in mathematics classes in School B. Time on administrative tasks and instruction is monitored prior to and during the 9-week intervention implementation period in mathematics and English classes in School B, as well as in Schools A and C through G. The researchers hypothesize that they will see an increase in instructional time in mathematics classes in School B but not in English classes in School B, and not in mathematics or English classes in the other schools.

Because the Institute expects each research team funded through the Low-performing Schools Research Initiative to develop and test a number of specific strategies to be utilized in improving low-performing schools, a multiple baseline design with construct controls could potentially allow a team to test the promise of more than one strategy at a time. A well implemented multiple baseline study that results in similar positive changes within a number of chronically low performing schools could provide evidence demonstrating the promise of the intervention.

Whatever design is proposed, applicants must provide a detailed research design. Applicants should clearly describe the proposed measures, provide technical information on the reliability and validity of the measures, detail procedures for collecting observations, and where applicable, specify procedures for monitoring and determining inter-observer reliability or agreement (e.g., Kappa) associated with the proposed measures during the study. Proximal outcomes are of greatest interest for determining if the strategies successfully address the identified problem (e.g., poor attendance). Applicants are encouraged to consider some distal outcomes (e.g., grades on unit tests) in order to examine whether addressing a specific problem is associated with movement on learning outcomes. Applicants must include a detailed description of their data analysis plan.

In strong applications, applicants use the proposed theory of change as a framework and make clear how the proposed measures link to the proximal and distal outcomes. In addition, applicants should describe how they will measure the steps in the theory of change process so that they can identify where the theory of change breaks down if an intervention is implemented with fidelity but the hypothesized improvement in school performance does not occur.

In strong applications, applicants detail procedures for measuring the fidelity of the implementation of the intervention. Applicants clearly describe (a) what needs to be observed in order to determine if the intervention is operating as intended and (b) how those observations will be collected. Observational, survey, or qualitative methodologies are encouraged to identify conditions that hinder implementation of the intervention.

D. Personnel

Competitive applicants will have research teams that collectively demonstrate expertise in (a) school improvement practices, (b) intervention development, (c) implementation of, and analysis of results from, the research design that will be employed, and (d) working with teachers, schools, or other education delivery settings. All proposals to the competition must include the involvement of local education agencies. Principals of the participating low-performing schools as well as district personnel are expected to be part of the team submitting the application. In the project narrative, applicants should briefly describe the qualifications, roles, responsibilities, and percent of time to be devoted to the project for key personnel.

E. Resources

In competitive proposals, applicants will describe having access to institutional resources that adequately support research activities and access to schools in which to conduct the research.

F. Awards

Typical awards for projects are $250,000 to $650,000 (total cost = direct + indirect costs) per year for a maximum of 5 years. Development costs vary according to the type of intervention that is proposed, therefore larger awards will be considered. In all cases, the size of the award depends on the scope of the project.

PART III GENERAL SUBMISSION AND REVIEW INFORMATION

5. MECHANISM OF SUPPORT
The Institute intends to award cooperative agreements pursuant to this request for applications. Through the cooperative agreements, the Institute will be involved in the coordination and direction of the awarded projects.

The length of the award period is 5 years.

6. FUNDING AVAILABLE
The size of the award depends on the scope of the project. Please see specific details in Part II Requirements of the Proposed Research section of the announcement. Although the plans of the Institute include the research program described in this announcement, awards pursuant to this request for applications are contingent upon the availability of funds and the receipt of a sufficient number of meritorious applications. The number of projects funded depends upon the number of high quality applications submitted. The Institute does not have plans to award a specific number of grants.

7. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS
Applicants that have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research are eligible to apply. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, non-profit and for-profit organizations and public and private agencies and institutions, such as colleges and universities.

8. SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS
Research supported through this program must be relevant to U.S. schools.

Recipients of awards are expected to publish or otherwise make publicly available the results of the work supported through this program. Institute-funded investigators should submit final, peer-reviewed manuscripts resulting from research supported in whole or in part by the Institute to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, http://eric.ed.gov) upon acceptance for publication. An author's final manuscript is defined as the final version accepted for journal publication, and includes all graphics and supplemental materials that are associated with the article. The Institute will make the manuscript available to the public through ERIC no later than 12 months after the official date of publication. Institutions and investigators are responsible for ensuring that any publishing or copyright agreements concerning submitted articles fully comply with this requirement.

Applicants must budget for two working meetings each year in Washington, D.C., with other grantees and Institute staff for a duration of up to two days, as well as one meeting in Washington, D.C. to attend the IES Research Conference each year (up to three days). At least two project representatives must attend each meeting.

Research applicants may collaborate with, or be, for-profit entities that develop, distribute, or otherwise market products or services that can be used as interventions or components of interventions in the proposed research activities. Involvement of the developer or distributor must not jeopardize the objectivity of the evaluation.

Applicants may propose studies that piggyback onto an existing study (i.e., requires access to subjects and data from another study). In such cases, the principal investigator of the existing study must be one of the members of the research team applying for the grant to conduct the new project.

The Institute strongly advises applicants to establish a written agreement among all key collaborators and their institutions (e.g., principal and co-principal investigators) regarding roles, responsibilities, access to data, publication rights, and decision-making procedures within three months of receipt of an award.

9. DESIGNATION OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

The applicant institution is responsible for identifying the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator is the individual who has the authority and responsibility for the proper conduct of the research, including the appropriate use of federal funds and the submission of required scientific progress reports. An applicant institution may elect to designate more than one principal investigator. In so doing, the applicant institution identifies them as individuals who share the authority and responsibility for leading and directing the research center intellectually and logistically. All principal investigators will be listed on any grant award notification. However, institutions applying for funding must designate a single point of contact for the center. The role of this person is primarily for communication purposes on the scientific and related budgetary aspects of the center and should be listed as the Principal Investigator. All other principal investigators should be listed as Co-Principal Investigators.

10. LETTER OF INTENT

The Institute asks all applicants to submit a Letter of Intent by 4:30 p.m. Washington D.C. time on the relevant due date for the competition to which they plan to submit. The information in the Letters of Intent enable Institute staff to identify the expertise needed for the scientific peer review panels and secure sufficient reviewers to handle the anticipated number of applications. The Institute encourages all interested applicants to submit a Letter of Intent, even if they think that they might later decide not to submit an application.   The letter of intent is not binding and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application.

The letter of intent form must be submitted electronically using the instructions provided at: https://ies.constellagroup.com. Receipt of the letter of intent will be acknowledged via email.

A. Content

The letter of intent should include:
    a. Descriptive title;
    b. Brief description of the proposed project;
    c. Name, institutional affiliation, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the principal investigator(s);
    d. Name and institutional affiliation of any key collaborators and contractors; and
    e. Estimated total budget request (The estimate need only be a rough approximation).

B. Format and Page Limitation

Fields are provided in the letter of intent form for each of the content areas described above. The project description should be single-spaced and should not exceed one page (about 3,500 characters).

11. MANDATORY SUBMISSION OF ELECTRONIC APPLICATIONS

Grant applications must be submitted electronically through the Internet using the software provided on the Grants.gov Web site: http://www.grants.gov/. Applicants must follow the application procedures and submission requirements described in the Institute's Grants.gov Application Submission Guide and the instructions in the User Guide provided by Grants.gov.

Applications submitted in paper format will be rejected unless the applicant (a) qualifies for one of the allowable exceptions to the electronic submission requirement described in the Federal Register notice announcing the Institute's education research and research training competitions (CFDA 84.305) and (b) submits, no later than two weeks before the application deadline date, a written statement to the Institute that documents that the applicant qualifies for one of these exceptions.

For more information on using Grants.gov, applicants should visit the Grants.gov web site.

12. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS AND APPLICATION PACKAGE
A. Documents Needed to Prepare Applications
To complete and submit an application, applicants need to review and use three documents: the Request for Applications, the IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide, and the Application Package.

- The *Request for Applications* for the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative (CFDA 84.305G) describes the substantive requirements for a research application.

  ✓ Request for Applications   http://ies.ed.gov/funding/

- The *IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide* provides the instructions for completing and submitting the forms. It is available on the Institute's website and on Grants.gov.

  ✓ IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide   http://ies.ed.gov/funding/ or
                                                   http://www.Grants.gov/

- The *Application Package* provides all of the forms that need to be completed and submitted. The application form approved for use in the competitions specified in this RFA is the government-wide SF424 Research and Related (R&R) Form (OMB Number 4040-0001). The applicant must follow the directions in section C below to download the Application Package from Grants.gov.

  ✓ Application Package   http://www.Grants.gov

B. Date Application Package is Available on Grants.gov
The application package will be available on http://www.Grants.gov/ beginning on the following date:

    Application Package Available on: August 3, 2009

Additional help navigating Grants.gov is available in the Grants.gov User Guide:

  ✓ Grants.gov User Guide   http://www.grants.gov/help/user_guides.jsp

C. Download Correct Application Package
a. CFDA number
Applicants must first search by the CFDA number for each IES Request for Applications *without* the alpha suffix to obtain the correct downloadable Application Package. For the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative Request for Applications, applicants must search on: **CFDA 84.305**.

b. Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative Application Package
The Grants.gov search on CFDA 84.305 will yield more than one application package. For the Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative Request for Applications applicants must download the package for the appropriate deadline marked:

    Application Package: **CFDA 84.305G Chronically Low-Performing Schools Research Initiative Application Package**

In order for the application to be submitted to the correct grant competition, applicants must download the Application Package that is designated for the grant competition and competition deadline. Using a

different Application Package, even if that package is for an Institute competition, will result in the application being submitted to the wrong competition.

13. SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINE
Applications must be submitted **electronically by 4:30 p.m**., **Washington, D.C. time** on the application deadline date, using the standard forms in the Application Package and the instructions provided on the Grants.gov website.

Potential applicants should check this site for information about the electronic submission procedures that must be followed and the software that will be required.

14. APPLICATION CONTENT AND FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS
A. Overview
In this section, the Institute provides instructions regarding the content of the (a) project summary/abstract, (b) project narrative, (c) bibliography and references cited, (d) Appendix A, and (e) Appendix B. Instructions for all other documents to be included in the application (e.g., forms, budget narrative, human subjects narrative) are provided in the IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide.

B. General Format Requirements
Margin, format, and font size requirements for the project summary/abstract, project narrative, bibliography, Appendix A, and Appendix B are described in this section. To ensure that the text is easy for reviewers to read and that all applicants have the same amount of available space in which to describe their projects, applicants must adhere to the type size and format specifications for the entire narrative including footnotes.

a. Page and margin specifications
For the purposes of applications submitted under this RFA, a "page" is 8.5 in. x 11 in., on one side only, with 1 inch margins at the top, bottom, and both sides.

b. Spacing
Text must be single spaced in the narrative.

c. Type size (font size)
Type must conform to the following three requirements:

- The height of the letters must not be smaller than a type size of 12 point.
- Type density, including characters and spaces, must be no more than 15 characters per inch (cpi). For proportional spacing, the average for any representative section of text must not exceed 15 cpi.
- Type size must yield no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical inch.

Applicants should check the type size using a standard device for measuring type size, rather than relying on the font selected for a particular word processing/printer combination. The type size used must conform to all three requirements. Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the application; consequently, the use of small type will be grounds for the Institute to return the application without peer review.

Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is necessary so that no applicant will have an unfair advantage, by using small type or by providing more text in their applications. **Note, these requirements apply to the PDF file as submitted**. As a practical matter, applicants who use a 12-point Times New Roman font without compressing, kerning, condensing or other alterations typically meet these requirements.

Figures, charts, tables, and figure legends may be in a smaller type size but must be readily legible.

d. Graphs, diagrams, tables
Applicants must use only black and white in graphs, diagrams, tables, and charts. The application must contain only material that reproduces well when photocopied in black and white.

C. Project Summary/Abstract
a. Submission
The project summary/abstract will be submitted as a .PDF attachment.

b. Page limitations and format requirements
The project summary/abstract is limited to one single-spaced page and must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements above.

c. Content
The project summary/abstract should include:

     (1)   Title of the project;
     (2)   Brief description of the purpose (e.g., to develop and document the feasibility of an intervention);
     (3)   Brief description of the district(s) in which the research will be conducted;
     (4)   Brief description of the population(s) from which the participants of the study(ies) will be sampled (age groups, race/ethnicity, SES);
     (5)   Brief description of the intervention to be developed;
     (6)   Brief description of the control or comparison condition (e.g., what will participants in the control condition experience);
     (7)   Brief description of the primary research method;
     (8)   Brief description of measures and key outcomes; and
     (9)   Brief description of the data analytic strategy.

Please see the website http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/projects/ for examples of project summaries/abstracts.

D. Project Narrative
a. Submission
The project narrative will be submitted as a .PDF attachment.

b. Page limitations and format requirements
The project narrative is limited to **25 single-spaced pages** for all applicants. The 25-page limit for the project narrative does not include any of the SF424 forms, the one-page summary/abstract, the appendices, research on human subjects information, bibliography and references cited, biographical sketches of senior/key personnel, narrative budget justification, subaward budget information or certifications and assurances.

Reviewers are able to conduct the highest quality review when applications are concise and easy to read, with pages numbered consecutively using the top or bottom right-hand corner.

c. Format for citing references in text
To ensure that all applicants have the same amount of available space in which to describe their projects in the project narrative, applicants should use the author-date style of citation (e.g., James, 2004), such as that described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Ed.* (American Psychological Association, 2001).

d. Content
To be compliant with the requirements of the Request for Applications, the project narrative must include four sections: (a) Significance; (b) Research Plan; (c) Personnel; and (d) Resources. Information to be included in each of these sections is detailed in **Part II: Requirements of the Proposed Research**. Incorporating the requirements outlined in these sections provides the majority of the information on which reviewers will evaluate the proposal.

E. Bibliography and References Cited
a. Submission
The section will be submitted as a separate .PDF attachment.

b. Page limitations and format requirements
There are no limitations to the number of pages in the bibliography. The bibliography must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in section III.14.B. General Format Requirements.

c. Content
Applicants should include complete citations, including the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), titles (e.g., article and journal, chapter and book, book), page numbers, and year of publication for literature cited in the research narrative.

F. Appendix A
a. Submission
Appendix A should be included at the end of the Project Narrative and submitted as part of the same .PDF attachment.

b. Page limitations and format requirements
Appendix A is limited to 15 pages. It must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in section III.14.B. General Format Requirements.

c. Content

(i)   Purpose.

The purpose of Appendix A is to allow the applicant to include any figures, charts, or tables that supplement the research text, examples of measures to be used in the project, and letters of agreement from partners (e.g., schools) and consultants. These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix A; all other materials will be removed prior to review of the application. Narrative text related to any aspect of the project (e.g., descriptions of the proposed sample, the design of the study, or previous research conducted by the applicant) must be included in the research narrative.

(ii)   Letters of agreement.

Letters of agreement should include enough information to make it clear that the author of the letter understands the nature of the commitment of time, space, and resources to the research project that will be required if the application is funded. The Institute recognizes that some applicants may have more letters of agreement than will be accommodated by the 15-page limit. In such instances, applicants should include the most important letters of agreement and may list the letters of agreement that are not included in the application due to page limitations.

G. Appendix B (Optional)
a. Submission
If applicable, Appendix B should be included at the end of the Project Narrative, following Appendix A, and submitted as part of the same .PDF attachment.

b. Page limitations and format requirements
The appendix is limited to 10 pages. The Appendix B must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in section III.14.B. General Format Requirements.

c. Content
The purpose of Appendix B is to allow applicants who are proposing to develop, evaluate, or validate an intervention or assessment to include examples of curriculum material, computer screens, test items, or other materials used in the intervention or assessment. These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix B; all other materials will be removed prior to review of the application. Narrative text related to the intervention (e.g., descriptions of research that supports the use of the intervention/assessment, the theoretical rationale for the intervention/assessment, or details regarding the implementation or use of the intervention/assessment) must be included in the 25-page research narrative.

15. APPLICATION PROCESSING
Applications must be received by **4:30 pm, Washington, D.C. time** on the application deadline date listed in the heading of this request for applications. Upon receipt, each application will be reviewed for completeness and for responsiveness to this request for applications. Applications that do not address specific requirements of this request will be returned to the applicants without further consideration.

16. PEER REVIEW PROCESS
Applications that are compliant and responsive to this request will be evaluated for scientific and technical merit. Reviews will be conducted in accordance with the review criteria stated below by a panel of scientists who have substantive and methodological expertise appropriate to the program of research and request for applications.

Each application will be assigned to one of the Institute's scientific review panels. At least two primary reviewers will complete written evaluations of the application, identifying strengths and weaknesses related to each of the review criteria. Primary reviewers will independently assign a score for each criterion, as well as an overall score, for each application they review. Based on the overall scores assigned by primary reviewers, an average overall score for each application will be calculated and a preliminary rank order of applications will be prepared before the full peer review panel convenes to complete the review of applications.

The full panel will consider and score only those applications deemed to be the most competitive and to have the highest merit, as reflected by the preliminary rank order. A panel member may nominate for consideration by the full panel any proposal that he or she believes merits full panel review but would not have been included in the full panel meeting based on its preliminary rank order.

17. REVIEW CRITERIA FOR SCIENTIFIC MERIT
The purpose of Institute-supported research is to contribute to the solution of education problems and to provide reliable information about the education practices that support learning and improve academic achievement and access to education for all students. Reviewers for all applications will be expected to assess the following aspects of an application in order to judge the likelihood that the proposed research will have a substantial impact on the pursuit of that goal. Information pertinent to each of these criteria is also described above in Part II Requirements of the Proposed Research.

A. Significance
Does the applicant provide a compelling rationale for the significance of the project as defined in the Significance of Project section?

B. Research Plan
Does the applicant meet the requirements described in the methodological requirements section?

C. Personnel
Does the description of the personnel make it apparent that the principal investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess appropriate training and experience and will commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed research? Does the applicant include school and district personnel as integral members of the research team?

D. Resources
Does the applicant have the facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources required to support the proposed activities? Do the commitments of each partner show support for the implementation and success of the project?

18. RECEIPT AND START DATE SCHEDULE

A. Letter of Intent Receipt Date:
Fall Application Letter of Intent   August 3, 2009

B. Application Deadline Date:
Fall Application Deadline Date   October 1, 2009

C. Earliest Anticipated Start Date:
For Fall Application   July 1, 2010

19. AWARD DECISIONS

The following will be considered in making award decisions:
- o   Scientific merit as determined by peer review
- o   Responsiveness to the requirements of this request
- o   Performance and use of funds under a previous Federal award
- o   Contribution to the overall program of research described in this request
- o   Availability of funds

20. INQUIRIES MAY BE SENT TO:

Dr. Allen Ruby   Dr. David Sweet
Institute of Education Sciences   Institute of Education Sciences
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW   555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208   Washington, DC 20208

Email: Allen.Ruby@ed.gov   Email: David.Sweet@ed.gov
Telephone: (202) 219-1591   Telephone: (202) 219-1748

21. PROGRAM AUTHORITY
20 U.S.C. 9501 et seq., the "Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002," Title I of Public Law 107-279, November 5, 2002. This program is not subject to the intergovernmental review requirements of Executive Order 12372.

22. APPLICABLE REGULATIONS
The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 74, 77, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86 (part 86 applies only to institutions of higher education), 97, 98, and 99. In addition 34 CFR part 75 is applicable, except for the provisions in 34 CFR 75.100, 75.101(b), 75.102, 75.103, 75.105, 75.109(a), 75.200, 75.201, 75.209, 75.210, 75.211, 75.217, 75.219, 75.220, 75.221, 75.222, and 75.230.

23. REFERENCES

American Psychological Association, Research Office (2001). *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.