

Research Networks Focused on Critical Problems of Education Policy and Practice

CFDA Number: 84.305N

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Product of the National Center for Education Research

Letter of Intent Due:	January 7, 2021	https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit
Application Package Available:	December 17, 2020	https://www.grants.gov
IES Submission Guide:	April 1, 2020	https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf
Application Deadline:	11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Time February 25, 2021	https://www.grants.gov
Possible Start Dates:	August 1 - September 1, 2021	

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Part I: Overview and Requirements

A. Purpose of the Education Research Networks Grants Program

Through its National Center for Education Research (NCER), the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) supports a program of research to build knowledge and understanding of education practice and policy. In this competition, NCER requests applications to form Research Networks Focused on Critical Problems of Education Policy and Practice (Networks). The Networks program focuses resources and attention on education problems or issues that are a high priority for the nation and that create both a structure and process for researchers who are working on these issues to share ideas, build new knowledge, and strengthen their research and dissemination capacity.

Networks advance the field's understanding of a problem or issue beyond what an individual research project or team is able to do on its own and to assist policymakers and practitioners in using this information to strengthen education policies and programs and improve [learner education outcomes](#). For FY 2021, IES invites proposals on two topics:

1. Building Adult Skills and Attainment through Technology Research Network (Adult Skills Network)
2. Digital Learning Platforms to Enable Efficient Education Research Network (Digital Learning Platforms Network)

Each network will consist of multiple teams in different roles working on the network's topic. The Adult Skills Network will consist of a team that coordinates and leads the network (Network Lead) and several research teams. Initially, the Digital Learning Platforms Network will consist of a Network Lead and several platform teams. Several research teams will be added to the Digital Learning Platforms Network at a later date through a different request for applications.

IES is establishing both the Adult Skills Network and the Digital Learning Platforms Network to fulfill the requirements in section 133(c)(1) of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 for national research and development centers.

For the FY 2021 competition, IES will consider only applications that are responsive and compliant to the requirements described in this Request for Applications (RFA) and submitted on time electronically via Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>).

For this competition, all awards will be made as cooperative agreements to support IES's involvement in the planning and implementation of network activities. As part of the cooperative agreements with IES, each network team, including the Network Leads, will commit to collaborative participation with the network. See [Part IV.B.1.b Network Commitments](#) for the specific agreements for members of each network.

B. Requirements

Applications to the Education Research Networks Grants program **must meet these requirements** to be sent forward for scientific peer review.

1. Education Outcomes

(a) Academic Outcomes

Research proposed under each topic **must** measure academic outcomes of learners. IES supports research on a diverse set of academic outcomes that reflect **learning and achievement** in academic content areas and learners' **successful progression** through education systems. IES is interested in the following academic outcomes:

- For **kindergarten through Grade 12**, learning, achievement, and higher order thinking in the academic content areas, including literacy¹, STEM, social studies²; English language proficiency; career and technical education (CTE) attainment³; and progression through education systems as indicated by course and grade completion, retention, high school graduation, and dropout
- For **postsecondary**, learning, achievement, and higher order thinking in postsecondary courses; and access to, persistence in, progress through, and completion of postsecondary education, which includes developmental education courses and bridge programs as well as programs that lead to occupational certificates, associate's, or bachelor's degrees
- For **adult education**⁴ achievement in literacy, English language proficiency, and numeracy, as well as access to, persistence in, progress through, and completion of adult education courses and programs

(b) Additional Outcomes - Recommended when Appropriate

In addition to a required academic outcome, IES encourages applicants to propose inclusion of additional outcomes relevant to their research focus when appropriate. All research proposals that

¹ By *literacy*, IES refers to language-based skills to include reading, writing, listening, and speaking regardless of modality (such as online or in person).

² *Social studies* outcomes are defined as a learner's understanding of government structures and processes and how to be an engaged and knowledgeable citizen through skills and knowledge in civics, citizenship, geography, history, and economics.

³ *CTE attainment* is defined as an indicator of mastery of CTE content or skills such as CTE course grades or credits earned, technical skills, assessment scores, industry certification, or employment outcomes in a field related to the CTE training.

⁴ *Adult education* refers to the system that serves learners at least 16-years old and outside the K-12 system who are preparing for, transitioning into, or currently enrolled in adult education, as defined in Title II of the 2015 Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIAO), such as Adult Basic Education, adult English language programs, and preparation programs for high school equivalency exams.

include such outcomes **must also include** a required academic outcome. Below is a non-exhaustive list of the additional outcomes applicants may propose.

- Employment and Earnings Outcomes
- Digital Literacy⁵
- Social and Behavioral Competencies⁶
- Educator Outcomes⁷

2. Education Settings

Proposed research must be relevant to education in the United States and must address factors under the control of U.S. education systems. Education in the U.S. is delivered in a wide range of formal settings, such as center-based prekindergarten, public and private K-12 schools, community and technical colleges, and 4-year colleges and universities. In addition, there are also formal programs under the control of education agencies that take place outside of school, including after-school, distance learning, online, and formal settings authorized by state or local agencies, such as adult education programs run through grants to community-based organizations. IES does not support research that is relevant only in informal contexts outside of education systems. Contact an IES program officer if you have questions about the setting you have identified for your proposed research.

3. Award Limits

The maximum grant award amount depends on the network role. All applicants should align their budgets with proposed project activities and provide justification for the amount requested in the budget narrative.

Network Topic	Network Role	Maximum Number of Awards	Maximum Grant Duration	Maximum Grant Award
Adult Skills	Research Team	6	5 years	\$3,800,000 per team
	Network Lead	1	5 Years	\$3,000,000
Digital Learning Platforms	Platform Team	5	5 years	\$2,000,000 per team
	Network Lead	1	5 years	\$3,000,000
	Research Team	Not being competed for FY2021		

⁵ For the purposes of this competition, we are adopting the American Library Association definition of the term *digital literacy*: “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.”

⁶ *Social and behavioral competencies* refer to the social skills, attitudes/emotions, and behaviors that are important to learners’ success in school and beyond.

⁷ *Educator outcomes* refers to measures of educator knowledge, skills, beliefs, behaviors, and/or practices.

C. Getting Started

1. Technical Assistance for Applicants

IES provides technical assistance to applicants that addresses the appropriateness of project ideas for this competition and methodological and other substantive issues concerning research in education settings. IES program officers work with applicants through a variety of formats up until the time of Grants.gov submission. If you submit a letter of intent (LOI) at <https://iesreview.ed.gov/>, a program officer will contact you regarding your proposed project. IES also provides funding opportunities webinars (live and on demand at <https://ies.ed.gov/funding/webinars/>) that include advice on choosing the correct competition, grant writing, and submitting your application.

The program officers for the two network topics in this RFA are -

- Building Adult Skills Research Network
Dr. Meredith Larson
(202) 245- 7037
Meredith.Larson@ed.gov
- Digital Learning Platforms Research Network
Dr. Erin Higgins
(202) 706-8509
Erin.Higgins@ed.gov

2. Eligible Applicants

Organizations that have the ability and capacity to conduct rigorous research are eligible to apply. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, institutions of higher education and non-profit, for-profit, public, or private agencies.

Broadening Participation in the Education Sciences: IES is interested in broadening institutional participation in its research grant programs. IES encourages applications from minority-serving institutions (MSIs), alone or in combination with other institutions, that meet the eligibility criteria for this RFA. MSIs include Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Predominantly Black Institutions, and Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions.

The Principal Investigator: The applicant organization is responsible for identifying the principal investigator (PI) on a grant application and may elect to designate more than one person to serve in this role. The PI 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. If more than one PI is named, the organization identifies these PIs as sharing the authority and responsibility for leading and directing the research project intellectually and logistically. All PIs will be listed on any grant award notification. However, organizations applying for funding must designate a single point of contact for the project. The role of this person is primarily for

communication purposes on the scientific and related budgetary aspects of the project, and this person should be listed as the PI. All other PIs should be listed as co-principal investigators.

3. RFA Organization and the IES Application Submission Guide

To submit a compliant, responsive, and timely application, you will need to review two documents:

1. *This RFA* - to learn how to prepare an application that is compliant and responsive to the requirements. [Part I](#) sets out the requirements for a grant application. [Part II](#) provides further detail on the requirements by topic. [Part III](#) provides information about general formatting and other narrative content for the application, including required appendices. [Part IV](#) provides general information on competition regulations and the review process. [Part V](#) provides a **checklist that you can use to ensure you have included all required application elements to advance to scientific peer review**. [Part VI](#) provides the topic and network role codes that you must enter in Item 4b of the SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance form.
2. *The IES Application Submission Guide* (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) - for important information about submission procedures and IES-specific guidance and recommendations to help you ensure your application is complete and received on time without errors through Grants.gov.

We strongly recommend that both the principal investigator (PI) and the authorized organization representative (AOR) read both documents, whether submitting a new or revised application.

4. Ensuring Your Application is Forwarded for Scientific Peer Review

Only compliant and responsive applications received before the date and time deadline are peer reviewed for scientific merit. The PI and the AOR should work together to ensure that the application meets these criteria.

(a) On-time submission

See the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>)

- Received and validated by Grants.gov no later than 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 25, 2021.

(b) Compliance

- Includes the **required project narrative** (see [Part II](#))
- Adheres to all formatting requirements (see [Part III](#))
- Adheres to all page limit maximums for the project narratives and appendices. IES will remove any pages above the maximum before forwarding an application for peer review
- Includes all **required appendices** (see [Part III](#))
 - [Appendix A: Dissemination History and Plan](#) (Adult Skills Network Research Teams only)
 - [Appendix E: Data Management Plan](#) (Adult Skills Network Research Teams only)

(c) Responsiveness

- Meets **requirements** for all applications (see [Parts II and III](#))
- Meets **requirements** by topic and network role (see [Part II](#))

Part II: Research Networks

A. Building Adult Skills and Attainment Through Technology Research Network

1. Background and Goals for the Adult Skills Network

(a) Overview of the Adult Skills Network

Roughly 43 million U.S. adults possess low literacy skills,⁸ and almost 63 million U.S. adults have low numeracy skills.⁹ About 12 percent of the U.S. adult population have less than a high school degree.¹⁰ For decades, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and advocacy groups have recommended leveraging technology to help build the basic skills and academic attainment of these adults.

Education technology is likely to be a key component of the solutions because technology allows for adaptive, any-time instruction and is pervasive in modern culture. However, national estimates indicate that roughly 16 percent of U.S. adults (approximately 32 million) may not have even rudimentary digital skills, meaning that they do not have prior experience with a computer, are unwilling to use computers for some tasks, or cannot pass a basic computer task (such as using a mouse to highlight text).¹¹ Even if adults have access to the required tools (such as the Internet), they may not benefit from education technology unless these technologies are developed and implemented with an awareness of learners' potential gaps in [digital literacy](#) and basic skills.

The research base to inform these efforts and implement effective solutions is limited. The Adult Skills Network will address this gap by facilitating the development, evaluation, and adoption of technology-supported interventions and the digital skills and competencies adults and practitioners need to benefit fully from technologies that aim to improve the basic skills or academic attainment of adults. The Adult Skills Network includes coordinate efforts in two areas: (1) basic and applied research and (2) dissemination and leadership.

(b) Major Activities of the Adult Skills Network

The Adult Skills Network will support two major activities to improve outcomes for adults with low basic skills or low academic attainment.

- 1. Basic and Applied Research:** Research teams will build theory, interventions, and evidence of impact to determine what types of technology-supported interventions and what digital skills or competencies are necessary to help which learners under what conditions. The outcomes of

⁸ <https://nces.ed.gov/datapoints/2019179.asp>

⁹ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020025.pdf>

¹⁰ For current results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, see https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/current_results.asp

¹¹ See Mamedova, S., Pawlowski, E., & Hudson, L. (2018). A description of U.S. adults who are not digitally literate. *Stats in Brief*. U.S. Department of Education, Washington DC. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018161>

these projects will inform developers, evaluators, or users of technology-supported interventions seeking to build adult basic skills or support their academic attainment.

- 2. Coordination, Leadership, and Dissemination:** The Network Lead will facilitate collaboration in the network and coordinate with stakeholders to determine research needs and interests and how to meet them. The Network Lead will provide national leadership to ensure that the public - including learners, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and developers – is engaged in discussions about and benefiting from the evidence about technology and adult skill-building generated by the Network. This dissemination work will help both curate and share existing knowledge.

At the completion of the Adult Skills Network, network members will have produced research findings that inform practice or policy and disseminated information to various stakeholders across the nation to help them develop, adopt, or deploy technology-supported interventions for adult learners.

2. Adult Skills Research Team Requirements

(a) Overview

Research Team projects may focus on the development or validation of measures (such as digital literacy measures), exploratory work to determine what may be appropriate for whom and under what conditions, development work to build or revise interventions, or the evaluation of interventions. Key, however, is that each research team links its work to the overall network goal to build theory and evidence to improve adult basic skills or academic attainment with technology.

(b) Research Team Project Narrative Requirements

Each Research Team project narrative **must** adhere to the formatting guidelines (see [Part III.B](#)) and be no more than 22 pages. If the narrative exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 22nd page of the narrative. The project narrative for a Research Team application **must** include four sections: Significance, Research Plan, Personnel, and Resources.

(1) Significance

The purpose of this section is to describe the type of work you propose and how it will support improving adult basic skills and attainment using technology.

You **must describe**

- The academic outcome(s) your study focuses on (see [Part I.B.1](#))
- The technology component of your study
- Your study's research questions

(2) Research Plan

The purpose of this section is to describe your research design, methods, and analysis plan and demonstrate how these will address the research questions. IES encourages the use of methods that combine both quantitative and qualitative analysis as relevant and appropriate.

You **must describe** the

- Characteristics of your sample or data source, which **must** include adult learners with low basic skills and/or academic attainment gaps
- Research design and methods for your study or studies
- The cost analysis plan for implementing an intervention, if you propose to develop one
- The cost analysis plan and the cost-effectiveness plan for the intervention, if you propose to test the impact of an intervention
- Data analysis plan for your study or studies

(3) Personnel

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that your team possesses the appropriate experience for the proposed research and dissemination activities and will commit enough time to the project.

You **must describe** your project team.

(4) Resources

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how you have the organizational capacity and access to resources needed to execute a project of this size and complexity and appropriately disseminate the findings and products.

You **must describe** your resources to conduct the project.

(c) Award Limits

(1) Duration Maximum

The maximum duration is **5 years**.

(2) Cost Maximum

The maximum cost for a project is **\$3,800,000** (total cost = direct + indirect costs).

Applicants should **request funds commensurate with the work they propose**, which may not require the maximum amount. For example, secondary data analysis with additional primary data collection may not require \$3.8 million. Applicants should use part of their requested funds to ensure that the research team is able to meet the [Network Commitments \(Part IV.B.1.b\)](#) for participation in the Network.

(3) Maximum Number of Awards

IES intends to make no more than six awards. However, should funding be available, IES may consider making additional awards to high-quality applications that remain unfunded after six awards have been made.

(d) Data Management Plan Requirement

All Adult Skills Research Team applications **must include** [Appendix E: Data Management Plan](#) (DMP).

IES program officers will be responsible for reviewing the completeness of the proposed DMP. Appendix F is not considered in the review of scientific merit of your application. If your application is being considered for funding based on the scores received during the scientific peer-review process, but your DMP is determined incomplete, you will be required to provide additional detail regarding your DMP. See the Part [III.C.6](#) for recommendations regarding your DMP.

(e) Dissemination History and Plan

All Adult Skills Research Team applications **must include** [Appendix A: Dissemination History and Plan](#).

IES is committed to making the results of IES-funded research available to a wide range of audiences (see IES Policy Regarding Public Access to Research; <https://ies.ed.gov/funding/researchaccess.asp>). To ensure that findings from the Education Research Grants program are available to all interested audiences, IES **requires all Adult Skills Research Team applicants** to -

- present a plan to disseminate project findings and resources so that they make meaningful contributions to education policy and practice
- describe their dissemination history to demonstrate their ability and capacity to disseminate research findings to a range of audiences, including educators, policymakers, learners, parents, and the public.

For Adult Skills Research Team applications, peer reviewers will score [Dissemination](#) as a separate criterion in the review process. **Adult Skills Research Team applications that do not contain a Dissemination History and Plan in Appendix A will not be peer reviewed.** See the Part [III.C.A](#) for recommendations regarding your Dissemination History and Plan.

(f) Recommendations for a Strong Application

These recommendations are intended to improve the quality of your application. Peer reviewers are asked to consider these recommendations in their evaluation of your application.

(1) Significance

Describe the barrier(s) to implementing effective technology-supported education or training activities for adult learners that practitioners, policymakers, or learners face and describe how your study will address such barriers. If you propose partnering with an education agency or provider for collaborative research to address local research needs, discuss how your research could generalize to other settings.

If you propose to research an existing intervention (policy, practice, curriculum, digital tool, etc.), describe how additional exploration, development, or evaluation of the intervention will further our understanding of the intervention or similar interventions and lead to subsequent research or changes in policy or practice and adult learner outcomes.

If you propose to develop or validate a measure, discuss why this contribution will be meaningful to the field, how it would compare with existing common measures, how you intend it to be used, and

who would use it, describe the instrument framework, and explain how the proposed validation activities will produce evidence to support the claims of the instrument framework.

If you propose to conduct exploratory work, describe the factors you propose to study and the relationships you expect them to have with learner outcomes.

Clearly describe your theory of change, illustrating how and why factors interconnect and may lead to beneficial academic outcomes. If conducting development or efficacy work, link the core intervention components to the theory of change.

If you propose to develop or evaluate an intervention, describe the population intended to benefit from the intervention and how your sample represents this larger population.

(2) Research Plan

Describe the factors you will study and how they are related to or lead to specific adult learner outcomes. Identify contextual factors and adult learner characteristics that may affect the association.

Describe your research design, which should be the most rigorous design that the research setting can support and that your research questions require.

To address your research questions, consider the full array of options, including - but not limited to - randomized control trials; sequential, multiple assignment, randomized trials (SMARTs); single-case designs; regression-discontinuity designs; or quasi-experimental designs. As appropriate, refer to the What Works Clearinghouse Standards to make a case for why your research design is appropriate and sufficiently rigorous to address your research questions (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Handbooks>).

If you propose mixed-methods approaches, describe how the different methodological approaches will inform one another.

Describe the data collection instruments you will use, the constructs they measure, and their reliability and validity.

The IES Standards for Excellence in Education Research (SEER) principles call for the use of common, existing instruments for measuring academic outcomes rather than researcher-developed measures (<https://ies.ed.gov/seer/index.asp>). Such measures include those that practitioners can use to inform instruction and the selection of interventions that work and that policymakers understand when determining the relative payoff of interventions. If such a measure does not exist, discuss how you will ensure your developed measure is appropriate and not biased in favor of finding effects of the intervention (if you are also studying an intervention). If such a measure does exist, discuss how you could use it as a benchmark for the work you are conducting.

If you propose to use measures that may be common in adult education settings, such as the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) or the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessments, you may also want to include other measures that may be more sensitive to the particular skills you are interested in to help measure both distal and more proximal outcomes.

For development and efficacy studies, discuss how you will determine users' digital skills and their ability to benefit from the technology and justify the use of the measure(s) you propose.

If your research is focusing on educators or professional development, include measures of the educator outcomes - such as measures of their knowledge, skills, and abilities - in addition to measures of learners' outcomes.

As appropriate to your research questions, IES recommends that you refer to the Recommendations for Strong Applications for project types in its Education Research Grants Program (CFDA 84.305A; https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/2021_84305A.pdf).

(3) Personnel

Identify and describe the expertise of all key personnel, including the principal investigator, co-principal investigators, and co-investigators on the project team regardless of whether they are located at the primary applicant organization or a subaward organization.

IES is interested in including individuals from groups that have typically been underrepresented in the education sciences. Describe the backgrounds and experiences of project team members in light of this.

Provide a plan for how key personnel will maintain their objectivity in conducting the proposed research and dissemination activities.

Identify the management structure and procedures that will be used to keep the project on track and ensure the quality of its work, including

- Roles and responsibilities of personnel on the project
- Percent of time per calendar year (academic months plus summer months) personnel will devote to the project

Discuss who will help coordinate with the other members of the Adult Skills Network and ensure that the research team is engaged with and meeting the expectations and needs of the network.

(4) Resources

Describe your organization's capacity to manage a grant of this size.

Describe your access to resources available at the primary organization and any subaward organizations.

Describe your plan for acquiring resources that are not currently accessible, will require significant expenditures, and are necessary for the successful completion of the project, such as equipment, test materials, curriculum, or training materials.

Describe any partnerships with education agencies or programs (such as public or non-profit) that will be part of the research and discuss the opportunities for practitioners to contribute to the research questions and implementation to help ensure your work's relevance.

Describe your access to the settings in which the research will take place. Include letters of agreement in [Appendix D](#) documenting their participation and cooperation. Convincing letters convey that the organizations understand what their participation in the study will involve, such as annual surveys, assessments, or classroom observations. Include information about incentives for participation, if applicable.

Describe your access to any necessary datasets. Include letters of agreement, data licenses, or existing memoranda of understanding in [Appendix D](#) to document that you will be able to access those data for your proposed use.

Describe your resources to carry out your plans to disseminate results as described in the required Dissemination Plan in [Appendix A: Dissemination History and Plan](#).

- Describe any offices or organizations expected to take part in your dissemination plans.
- Describe resources to support dissemination through electronic means such as a website, social media account(s), electronic newsletter, listserv, or other electronic dissemination approach.
- Give examples of how you will contribute to and implement a network-wide dissemination plan.

3. Adult Skills Network Lead Requirements

(a) Overview

The Adult Skills Network Lead is responsible for coordinating network activities, ensuring communication among network members, IES, and other stakeholders and providing national leadership and dissemination by sharing what is known about building adult basic skills or academic attainment through technology and helping to engage communities outside the network.

To ensure coordination of network activities and communication among network members, the Network Lead will plan and facilitate regular meetings with all network members. The Lead will host at least one annual in-person meeting¹² for all network teams and virtual working group meetings approximately quarterly. The Network Lead will also coordinate network goals, including preparing a network-wide dissemination plan and data management plan, and monitoring progress towards these goals with IES assistance.

Through the national leadership and dissemination activities, the Network Lead will ensure that those interested in adult basic skills or academic attainment learn about the network's activities and are able to engage in ways that support their work and their interests. Within the first year, the Network Lead will establish a website and social media presence to share information about network activities and research findings. The Network Lead will also conduct engagement activities that (a) facilitate interactions among those interested in education technology for adult basic skills or academic attainment (such as learners, practitioners, researchers, or policymakers) and research and (b) summarize or curate existing information or tools relevant to adult skills, attainment, and technology. Examples of interactive activities include webinars or online professional development series, databases for researchers and programs to build research teams, or a Help Desk that provides information about particular topics. Examples of the summarizing or curating activities include, but are not limited to, a series of working papers, a database of learning technologies for adults, or videos demonstrating evidence-based teaching practices for adult education providers.

¹² If travel restrictions or public health concerns limit the ability for in-person meetings, the Network Lead will work with IES to determine how best to conduct the annual meeting.

(b) Network Lead Project Narrative

Each Network Lead project narrative **must** adhere to the formatting guidelines (see [Part III.B](#)) and be **no more than 15 pages**. If the narrative exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 15th page of the narrative. The project narrative for a Network Lead application **must** include four sections: Significance, Network Lead Activities, Personnel, and Management and Organizational Resources.

(1) Significance

The purpose of this section is to describe the overarching goals of the Network Lead and how you will provide leadership around issues of national need relevant to adult basic skills or academic attainment and the appropriate use of technology for improving adults' outcomes.

You **must describe** why your proposed goals are important for addressing issues related to improving adult basic skills or attainment.

(2) Network Lead Activities

The purpose of this section is to describe the Network Lead's activities in network coordination management and national leadership and dissemination.

You **must describe** your plans for

- Establishing and monitoring network goals
- Meetings with network members
- National leadership and dissemination, which must include establishing a website and social media presence within the first year and conducting engagement activities

(3) Personnel

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that your team possesses appropriate experience for the proposed activities and will commit enough time to the project.

You **must describe** your project team.

(4) Management and Organizational Resources

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that you have the organizational structure, capacity, and resources to access to the resources needed to carry out and effectively manage the project.

You **must describe** the

- Plans and procedures for the overall management of the Adult Skills Network
- Resources to conduct the work of the Adult Skills Network

(c) Award Limits

Awards made under the Adult Skills Network Lead topic **must** conform to the following limits on duration and cost.

(1) Duration Maximum

The maximum duration of an Adult Skills Network Lead is **5 years**.

(2) Cost Maximum

The maximum cost for an Adult Skills Network Lead award is **\$3,000,000** (total cost = direct costs + indirect costs).

(3) Maximum Number of Awards

IES intends to make **no more than one** Network Lead award.

(d) Recommendations for a Strong Application

These recommendations are intended to improve the quality of your application, and the peer reviewers are asked to consider these recommendations in their evaluation of your application.

(1) Significance

Describe the national need for research in adult basic skills and academic attainment and explain how the research network as a whole and the Network Lead specifically could help improve the state of knowledge through research and dissemination activities.

Describe your vision for how the Network Lead will support the network as a whole and how your activities may benefit from the activities of the research teams.

Discuss how your website and social media presence will address a national need for information about adult basic skills, and identify the types of stakeholders (learners, instructors, administrators, researchers, etc.) you envision appealing to.

Describe the need your national engagement activities will fulfil. Note which stakeholder groups may participate in or benefit from proposed activities (such as a database to connect researchers with potential programs, online professional development series for practitioners, etc.) and which groups may use the products you create to summarize or curate what is already known (such as a compendium of available learning technologies for adults, a white paper series on technology-facilitated teaching practices, etc.).

(2) Network Lead Activities

Provide a timeline that shows when major activities will take place and a description of how those activities will inform one another and how they build from or feed into the Adult Skills Network's activities. This may be included in [Appendix B: Supplemental Charts, Tables, and Figures](#).

Network coordination and management activities:

Discuss your plans for convenings with network members including the goals for meeting with them, how you will facilitate the exchange of information and ideas, and how you might work with them and IES to determine training or dissemination needs and to form appropriate plans to meet these needs. You might consider including a proposed agenda for the first meeting in your narrative or [Appendix B](#).

National leadership and dissemination activities:

Describe the Adult Skills Network website you will design, including its content and the audiences you intend to reach. Discuss your use of social media and electronic forms of communication (such as webinars, podcasts, and videos) to broaden the reach of the network at a relatively low cost and how you will launch these efforts during the first year. Describe the specific products (papers, videos, tools,

etc.) you will produce to help the stakeholders you have identified, including how you envision them finding and using these products.

Describe the groups of stakeholders (such as adult education learners or practitioners, policymakers, education technology developers, and/or education researchers and evaluators) who may benefit from your national engagement activities and how you will facilitate their interactions (virtually or in person).

Provide a plan for identifying and summarizing or curating existing information or tools relevant to adult basic skills, academic attainment, and technology use. Describe how you will determine whether the product of this work is meeting its audience's needs and how you would revise or adapt if necessary.

(3) Personnel

Identify and describe expertise and qualifications of the Network Lead team at the primary applicant organization and at any subaward organizations.

IES is interested in including individuals from groups that have typically been underrepresented in the education sciences. Describe the backgrounds and experiences of Network Lead members in light of this.

Identify and describe the following for all key personnel, including the principal investigator, co-principal investigators, and co-investigators:

- Percent of time and calendar months per year (academic plus summer) to be devoted to the project
- Experience that is relevant to national leadership activities, including communications and dissemination, engaging stakeholders in interactive activities, and summarizing or curating information or resources.
- Experience and capacity to manage a project of this size and type

IES encourages applicants to partner with an interdisciplinary team of researchers, developers and industry representatives, and program administrators and practitioners to help guide the activities.

Include a plan for how key personnel will maintain their objectivity with regard to the summarizing or curating activities.

Discuss who will manage the communications across the network and with the public. Strong applications will have a dedicated communications manager or communications team.

(4) Management and Organizational Resources

Describe your plans and procedures for the overall management of the Adult Skills Network and its diverse activities.

Identify the management structure and procedures that you will use to ensure that the Adult Skills Network is responsive to the concerns and needs of IES and how the Network Lead would address potential conflicts among teams.

Include an organization chart that shows how the major functions or activities of the Network Lead and the Adult Skills Network itself will be organized and how key personnel will relate to one another (may be included in [Appendix B](#)).

Document the availability and cooperation of the settings or experts required to carry out your plan via letters of agreement in [Appendix D](#) of your application.

C. Digital Learning Platforms to Enable Efficient Education Research Network

1. Background and Goals for the Digital Learning Platforms Network

(a) Overview of the Digital Learning Platforms Network

Education research is often a slow and costly process. Even more difficult is replicating research in a timely and cost-effective way to ensure that findings are meaningful for the wide range of contexts and populations that make up our nation's education system. Conducting research through widely used digital learning platforms may accelerate the research enterprise and make it easier to conduct replication research.

The goal of this Network is to leverage existing, widely used digital learning platforms for rigorous education research. Digital learning platforms have the potential to support researchers as they study new ideas and seek to replicate studies quickly across many sites with a wide range of student populations. These platforms may also facilitate broader participation from educators interested in education research. While there are many digital learning platforms, only a handful currently support research studies.

Successfully achieving this goal requires a network of education technology industry leaders and developers, education researchers, and education practitioners. This Network will provide an infrastructure to facilitate these collaborations. Creating this network is even more critical now due to the dramatic shift to online learning and digital learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the purposes of this RFA, IES is defining a widely used digital learning platform as a technology that has the following features:

- (1) Has over 100,000 users in K-12 schools or postsecondary institutions
- (2) Is implemented through a device such as a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone
- (3) Has the flexibility to engage learners in multiple types of tasks such as answering questions and receiving feedback, engaging in a simulation, having discussions with teachers and peers; and/or the flexibility to administer multiple types of curricula such as a supplemental science curriculum for middle school learners and supplemental math practice for high school learners
- (4) Has the capacity to collect multiple types of user data, such as logs of users' interactions, correct and incorrect student responses, and amount of time spent interacting with the platform
- (5) Addresses one or more of the education outcomes for K-12 and/or postsecondary education listed in [Part I](#) of this RFA.

This network will be composed of multiple platform teams, multiple research teams, and a network lead. This current competition is to establish the network lead and to fund up to five platform teams. Specific requirements and recommendations for these roles are provided below. IES will hold a separate competition for the research teams after the platform teams have been identified.

(b) Goals of the Digital Learning Platforms Network

The network will

- (1) **Extend the capacity of multiple digital learning platforms to enable rigorous education research.** Each platform team will revise a widely used digital learning platform to create features, portals, dashboards, data-sharing tools, and other system components needed to conduct research within the platform. These revisions should be able to support multiple types of research including but not limited to (1) large-scale efficacy and replication studies of interventions across a wide range of sites and (2) feedback loops that use the data collected through the platform to identify and improve the implementation of core components of interventions and contribute to theories about how people learn. The teams will also develop the infrastructure necessary to facilitate collaboration across researchers and education stakeholders.
- (2) **Conduct national leadership and outreach.** All members of the network will engage in leadership and outreach. The Network Lead will coordinate these activities for the network. Leadership activities will include convenings of platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders to discuss challenges such as data privacy, collaboration tools, and the types of meaningful outcomes that can be collected by platforms that would be useful for practitioners. The Network Lead will summarize research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge generated through these activities and share it out with the broader community in various ways, such as through white papers and short briefs. Additional outreach activities include showcasing the digital platforms to researchers and education stakeholders, creating a website, and coordinating the network's communication and social media strategy to ensure the network's products reach a variety of stakeholders, including researchers, developers, and education personnel at the school, district, and state levels.
- (3) **Establish collaborations between platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders.** The Network Lead will bring together leading education technology developers, researchers, and education personnel to identify ways to answer research questions that address the needs of education stakeholders. These collaborations will serve as a model for the field.
- (4) **Demonstrate the promise of conducting high-quality, quick-turnaround research studies using digital platforms.** Research teams (funded through a separate competition at a later date) will conduct studies using the revised platforms that will serve as examples for the field as well as provide opportunities to improve the platforms.

In sum, the Digital Learning Platforms Network will support the transformation of multiple widely used digital learning platforms so that they may be used by researchers and education stakeholders; conduct numerous high-quality research studies and replications demonstrating the promise of this research approach for a variety of research goals and methodologies; and provide examples for the field for how platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders can collaborate effectively.

2. Digital Learning Platform Team Requirements

(a) Overview

Each digital learning platform team will conduct independent, but coordinated, activities. Each platform team will revise an existing digital learning platform to support multiple types of research

including but not limited to (1) large-scale efficacy and replication studies of interventions across a wide range of sites and (2) feedback loops that use the data collected through the platform to identify and improve the implementation of core components of interventions and contribute to theories about how people learn. In addition, each platform team will develop infrastructure to support collaboration with researchers and education personnel. To be responsive to the Digital Learning Platforms Network topic and forwarded for peer review, the proposed project must meet the requirements listed below.

(b) Platform Team Project Narrative Requirements

Each platform team project narrative **must** adhere to the formatting guidelines (see [Part III.B](#)) and be **no more than 22 pages**. If the narrative exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 22nd page of the narrative. The project narrative for a platform team application **must** include four sections: Significance, Platform Development Plan, Personnel, and Resources.

(1) Significance

The purpose of this section is to describe the digital learning platform you intend to build upon.

You **must describe** the characteristics of your platform to demonstrate that it meets the request for application's definition of a widely used digital learning platform.

(2) Platform Development Plan

The purpose of this section is to describe your plans for revising your digital learning platform to allow researchers and education stakeholders to address their research questions.

You **must describe**

- The features, portals, dashboards, data-sharing tools, and/or other system components that will be developed to support the implementation of research studies in collaboration with researchers and education stakeholders
- Plans to collect feedback from users (such as learners, educators, and researchers) to iteratively improve the platform
- Plans to test the feasibility of implementing the revised platform for research purposes and to examine the usability of the revised platform

(3) Personnel

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that your team possesses the appropriate experience for the proposed development and will commit enough time to the project. IES expects this team will draw heavily from education technology industry developers.

You **must describe** your project team.

(4) Resources

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how you have the organizational capacity and access to resources needed to execute a project of this size and complexity.

You **must describe** your resources to conduct the project.

(c) Award Limits

(1) Duration Maximum

The maximum duration of platform team award is **5 years**.

(2) Cost Maximum

The maximum cost for each platform team award is **\$2,000,000** (total cost = direct + indirect costs).

(3) Maximum Number of Awards

IES intends to make **no more than five awards**. However, should funding be available, IES may consider making additional awards to high-quality applications that remain unfunded after five awards have been made.

(d) Recommendations for a Strong Application

These recommendations are intended to improve the quality of your application, and the peer reviewers are asked to consider these recommendations in their evaluation of your application.

(1) Significance

Describe the learner outcomes your platform focuses on and the importance of those outcomes.

Describe the number and characteristics of your platform's active users.

Describe the user experience, including specifics about the learning tasks that learners engage in, the ways in which education personnel interact with the platform, and the ways in which the platform is implemented in education settings.

Describe any prior research that supported the development of the platform.

Provide examples of the kinds of research you envision your platform being able to support. Explain how research findings would be used to inform how the platform works as well as inform education practice.

Describe your approach and vision for revising your platform to ensure that it meets the needs of researchers and educators who want to conduct research using your platform.

(2) Platform Development Plan

Describe the design process for developing features and tools to support research.

Describe how you will develop the infrastructure and processes to address issues such as data privacy, data sharing, IRB, and protocols.

Describe your plans to collect feedback from educators and researchers to inform the development of the features and tools to support research. Explain how this feedback will be incorporated into the design plan and timeline.

Identify the measures that could be collected through your platform that would be informative for education research. Describe plans to study or document the psychometric properties of the data that are collected through the platform.

Describe plans to test the feasibility and usability of implementing the revised platform for research purposes with researchers and education partners involved in research.

Explain how you will assess that you have succeeded in meeting the needs of researchers and education stakeholders.

Provide a clear timeline for the project. Timeline tables or figures should be placed in either the project narrative or [Appendix B: Supplemental Charts, Tables, and Figures](#), but discussion of the timeline should be included only in the project narrative.

(3) Personnel

Identify and describe expertise and qualifications of the project team at the primary applicant organization and at any subaward organizations to carry out the proposed work. Because the focus of the platform teams' work will be on revising widely used digital learning platforms, strong teams will include or be led by education technology industry leaders and developers.

IES is interested in including individuals from groups that have typically been underrepresented in education technology research and development. Describe the backgrounds and experiences of project team members in light of this.

Describe any partnerships with education agencies to carry out the proposed work. Including education agencies as partners ensures that platform development teams focus on outcomes that are meaningful to education practitioners and policymakers.

Identify the management structure and procedures that will be used to keep the project on track and ensure the quality of its work, including

- Roles and responsibilities of personnel on the project
- Percent of time per calendar year that personnel will devote to the project

Discuss who will help coordinate with the other members of the Digital Learning Platforms Network including the Network Lead and ensure that the platform team is engaged with and meeting the expectations and needs of the network.

(4) Resources

Describe your organization's capacity to manage a grant of this size.

Describe your access to resources available at the primary and any subaward organizations.

Describe your plan for acquiring resources that are not currently accessible, will require significant expenditures, and are necessary for the successful completion of the project, such as equipment, test materials, curriculum, or training materials.

Describe your access to any necessary datasets. Include letters of agreement, data licenses, or existing memoranda of understanding in [Appendix D](#), if applicable to your project.

3. Digital Learning Platforms Research Team Requirements

(a) Overview

The Digital Learning Platforms research teams are not part of the current request for applications. At a future date, IES will release a separate request for applications inviting research teams to apply to conduct research using one or more of the digital learning platforms that are the focus of the Network's platform teams.

4. Digital Learning Platforms Network Lead Requirements

(a) Overview

The Network Lead is responsible for setting and coordinating the overall vision for the network and providing national leadership and outreach related to using digital learning platforms for research.

For the first year, the Network Lead will be responsible for several activities. The Network Lead will engage in planning and logistical work to coordinate the members of the network. The Network Lead will also begin to coordinate, alongside other members of the network, a group of education partners, such as local and state education agencies and/or postsecondary institutions, interested in participating in research using the digital learning platforms that are the focus of the platform teams. The Network Lead will convene meetings with digital platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders. These meetings should focus on the needs of each stakeholder group, the challenges of doing research using digital platforms, and the infrastructure needed to facilitate collaboration. The Network Lead will summarize research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge generated from these convenings to share out with the broader community through white papers and short briefs as part of its dissemination activities. For example, the Network Lead could provide an overview of the landscape of digital learning tools to identify trends and gaps across content areas and age ranges. Finally, the Network Lead will establish a website and social media presence to help inform relevant communities about the existence and goals of the network.

In the following years, the Network Lead will take on the responsibility of coordinating the platform teams and research teams. Coordination activities include planning and facilitating meetings with all network members, including at least one in-person meeting per year¹³ and virtual quarterly meetings. In addition, the Network Lead will work with a group of education partners interested in participating in research using the digital learning platforms and facilitate their participation in the research process alongside the research and Platform Teams. The Network Lead will also be responsible for identifying the shared goals of the network, including a network-level dissemination plan and data management plan, and monitoring progress towards these goals with IES assistance. Finally, the Network Lead will continue to summarize research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge generated from the network's activities to share out with the broader community through white papers and short briefs as part of its dissemination activities.

¹³ If travel restrictions or public health concerns limit the ability for in-person meetings, the Network Lead will work with IES to determine how best to conduct the annual meeting.

(b) Network Lead Project Narrative

Each Network Lead project narrative **must** adhere to the formatting guidelines (see [Part III.B](#)) and be **no more than 15 pages**. If the narrative exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 15th page of the narrative. The narrative for a Network Lead application **must** include four sections: Significance, Network Lead Activities, Personnel, and Management and Organizational Resources.

(1) Significance

The purpose of this section is to describe how your vision for the Digital Learning Platforms Network fits with IES's goals and how you will provide leadership around issues of national need relevant to using digital learning platforms for research.

You **must describe** how your vision for the Digital Learning Platforms Network fits with IES's goals.

(2) Network Lead Activities

The purpose of this section is to describe the Network Lead's activities in planning and logistics, network coordination management, research synthesis, and national leadership, outreach, and dissemination.

You **must describe**

- For Year 1:
 - Plans for convening virtual and in-person meetings to establish an understanding of what is needed to facilitate effective collaborations among digital learning platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders
 - Plans to summarize research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge generated from the convenings through white papers and short briefs
 - Plans to begin recruiting a network of education partners who are interested in participating in research using the digital learning platforms that are the focus of the platform teams
 - Plans for a website and a social media strategy
- For the remaining years of the network:
 - Plans for virtual and in-person meetings with network members and for establishing and monitoring network goals
 - Plans for continuing to summarize and share research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge gained from network activities through white papers and short briefs
 - Plans for continuing communications using a website and social media
 - Plans for disseminating the findings from the research generated by the network

(3) Personnel

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that your team possesses appropriate experience for the proposed Network Lead activities and will commit enough time to the project.

You **must describe** your project team.

(4) Management and Organizational Resources

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that you have the organizational structure, capacity, and access to the resources needed to carry out and effectively manage the project.

You **must describe** the

- Plans and procedures for the overall management of the Digital Learning Platforms Network
- Resources to conduct the Network Lead activities of the Digital Learning Platforms Network

(c) Award Limits

Awards made under the Digital Learning Platforms Network Lead topic **must** conform to the following limits on duration and cost.

(1) Duration Maximum

The maximum duration of a Digital Learning Platforms Network Lead project is **5 years**.

(2) Cost Maximum

The maximum cost for a Digital Learning Platforms Network Lead project is **\$3,000,000** (total cost = direct costs + indirect costs).

(3) Maximum Number of Awards

IES intends to make **no more than one** Network Lead award.

(d) Recommendations for a Strong Application

These recommendations are intended to improve the quality of your application and the peer reviewers are asked to consider these recommendations in their evaluation of your application.

(1) Significance

Describe your vision for what is needed to facilitate collaborations across digital learning platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders to improve the use of digital platforms for research purposes.

Describe your understanding of digital learning platform usage in K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions and identify the additional platform features and infrastructure that would need to be added to facilitate high-quality research.

Describe how the Network Lead's activities will contribute to building knowledge about and capacity for using digital learning platforms to enable a variety of rigorous research approaches, including replication studies with different student populations and in different contexts.

Describe the barriers and challenges the network and its members may face and how you could help the network navigate through these challenges.

Identify the opportunities that could emerge through the network and how your support of them would benefit the network, stakeholders, and the field more broadly.

(2) Network Activities

Provide a timeline that shows when major activities will take place and a description of how those activities will inform one another and how they build from or feed into the broader goals of the network.

Describe the types of people who may want to engage with the network through convenings and collaborations, such as digital learning platform developers, education researchers and evaluators, school-, district-, and state-level education personnel, and educators and administrators at postsecondary institutions. Discuss what mechanisms could be developed or further supported to encourage collaboration and mutual learning.

Consider activities that bring together different stakeholders and identify topics that may be of shared interest. For example, the network could help developers, researchers, and education stakeholders think together about how to protect students' privacy and navigate various data privacy regulations.

For stakeholder convenings and network meetings, you may consider including an example agenda in your narrative or [Appendix B](#).

Identify possible research topics you could summarize and share out through white papers and briefs and explain how you will disseminate them to key stakeholders. Possible topics may include -

- 1) Identification of digital learning platforms that have a large enough user base to support large scale research studies in K-12 and postsecondary education
- 2) Content areas or grade levels that are and are not well supported through digital learning platforms and ideas for how gaps in coverage could be addressed
- 3) Descriptions of the key features that a platform needs to support rigorous tests and rapid replication of research findings
- 4) Identification of challenges for digital platform developers interested in participating in this effort and potential solutions to address them
- 5) Identification of major research questions that could be answered using digital learning platforms
- 6) Description of the infrastructure needed for a platform to enable seamless collaborations between education stakeholders, researchers, and product developers

Provide a plan for a coordinated dissemination effort for the network. Identify existing forums, such as annual professional conferences, where the network members can disseminate to technical and non-technical audiences.

Describe the Digital Learning Platforms Network website you will design, including its content and the audiences you intend to reach. Discuss your use of social media and electronic forms of communication (such as webinars, podcasts, and videos) to broaden the reach of the network at a relatively low cost.

(3) Personnel

Identify and describe the expertise and qualifications of the project team at the primary applicant organization and at any subaward organizations. Also include -

- Roles and responsibilities of personnel on the project
- Proportion of time personnel will devote to the project, expressed as percent effort over a 12-month calendar year

IES is interested in including individuals from groups that have typically been underrepresented in the education sciences. Describe the backgrounds and experiences of project team members in light of this.

Describe how the backgrounds and experiences of the project team will support the successful conduct of the proposed work. Include the following details:

- Experience that is relevant to national leadership and outreach activities
- Experience and capacity to manage a project of this size and type

IES strongly encourages applicants to propose partnerships with researchers, education technology leaders and developers, and other education stakeholders to help guide the network's program of research and development as well as the national leadership and outreach activities.

Discuss who will manage the communications across the network and with the public. Strong applications will have a dedicated communications manager or communications team.

(4) Management and Organizational Resources

Describe your plans and procedures for the overall management of the Digital Learning Platforms Network and its diverse activities.

Identify the management structure and procedures that you will use to ensure that the Digital Learning Platforms Network is responsive to the concerns and needs of IES and how the Network Lead would address potential conflicts among teams.

Include an organizational chart that shows how the major functions or activities of the Network Lead and the Digital Learning Platforms Network itself will be organized and how key personnel will relate to one another.

Part III: Preparing Your Application

A. Overview

The application contents—individual forms and their PDF attachments—represent the body of an application to IES. IES encourages you to refer to the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) for additional information about preparing to submit your application and ensuring your application is sufficient.

B. General Formatting

To ensure that reviewers can read your application and that all applicants have similar expectations for length and space, IES specifies the following formatting conventions. 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. These requirements apply to the PDF file as submitted, unless otherwise specified. In order for an application to be compliant and sent forward for review, the applicant should ensure that each narrative section follows both the page limit maximums and the formatting guidelines below unless otherwise specified.

1. *Page and Margin Specifications*

For all IES grant applications, a “page” is 8.5 in. x 11 in. on one side only with 1-inch margins at the top, bottom, and both sides.

2. *Page Numbering*

Add page numbers using the header or footer function and place them at the bottom or upper right corner for ease of reading.

3. *Spacing*

Text must be single spaced.

4. *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.

You 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. Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the application; consequently, the use of small type will be grounds for IES to return the application without scientific peer review.

As a practical matter, if you use a 12-point Times New Roman font without compressing, kerning, condensing, or other alterations, the application will typically meet these requirements.

5. Graphs, Diagrams, and Tables

IES encourages you to use black and white in graphs, diagrams, tables, and charts. If color is used, you should ensure that the material reproduces well when printed or photocopied in black and white.

Text in figures, charts, and tables, including legends, may be in a type size smaller than 12-point but must be readily legible.

C. Required and Optional Appendices

The required project narrative that is described for each topic and network role (see [Part II: Research Networks](#)) is followed by several appendices. Some of these appendices are required, and some are optional. When you submit your application through Grants.gov, you will create a single PDF file that *contains the project narrative and all appendices* and include it as an attachment in the application package. Include appendices in alphabetical order and simply skip an appendix if it is not required for your application or if you choose not to include one of the optional appendices. See the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) for more information about preparing and submitting your application using the required application package for this competition through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov/>).

The project narrative and appendices are critical parts of the IES application because they include the substantive content that will be reviewed for theoretical and practical significance and scientific merit.

1. Appendix A: Dissemination History and Plan (Required for Adult Skills Research Team Applicants only)

Adult Skills Research Team applicants **must** include Appendix A after the project narrative. Network Lead applicants are not required to submit this appendix because dissemination will be addressed extensively in the project narrative. Platform team applicants within the Digital Learning Platform Network are not required to include Appendix A due to the nature of their work.

Appendix A includes two sections: Dissemination History and Dissemination Plan. Appendix A **must** meet the general formatting guidelines and be **no more than three pages**, including one page for the Dissemination History and two pages for the Dissemination Plan. If Appendix A exceeds this three-page limit, IES will remove any pages after the third page of the appendix before it is forwarded for scientific peer review.

(a) Dissemination History

The dissemination history is intended to demonstrate that the research you have conducted in the past has been disseminated in a way that is consistent with the IES mission to promote scientifically valid research findings that can provide the basis for improving academic instruction and lifelong learning. Applicants who have never had an IES grant should focus on describing the dissemination history of related, past projects. Reviewers will use this information to determine whether the project personnel have the experience necessary to carry out the proposed dissemination plan.

The dissemination history should include the following:

- A brief description of the outcomes of prior research, including products developed or tested and how the project's findings and products were disseminated
- For interventions or assessments that were developed through one or more projects and have evidence of impact on learner outcomes or of the validity and reliability of the assessment for intended purposes and learners, an explanation for how it has been made available to users, the number of active users of the product, the number of users of the product during its history, and funding agreements or outside investments for commercialization (if applicable)
- Other unique dissemination products or notable presentations of research findings, particularly those that were intended for practitioners, policymakers, parents, students, and/or the general public

(b) Dissemination Plan

Describe your plan to disseminate the findings from the proposed project. Dissemination plans should be tailored to the audiences that will benefit from the findings and reflect the unique purposes of the project.

Identify the audiences that you expect will most likely benefit from your research, such as federal and state policymakers, program administrators and local school system administrators, school administrators, educators, parents, learners, and other education researchers.

Discuss the different ways in which you intend to reach these audiences through the publications, presentations, and products you expect to produce.

IES-funded researchers are expected to publish and present in venues designed for policymakers and practitioners in a manner and style useful and usable to this audience. For example -

- Report findings to the education agencies and schools that provided the data and data-collection opportunities
- Give presentations and workshops at meetings of professional associations of teachers and leaders
- Publish in practitioner journals
- Engage in activities with relevant IES-funded Research and Development (R&D) Centers (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/research/randdCenters.asp>), other Research Networks (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/research/researchNetworks.asp>), or Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs; <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/>)

IES-funded researchers who create products for use in research and practice as a result of their project (such as curricula, professional development programs, measures and assessments, guides, and toolkits) are expected to make these products available for research purposes or (after evaluation or validation) for general use. IES encourages researchers to consider how these products could be brought to market to increase their dissemination and use. IES-funded researchers are expected to publish their findings in scientific, peer-reviewed journals and present at conferences attended by other researchers. Your Dissemination Plan should reflect the purpose of your network role as described in Part II.

The Dissemination History and Plan is the only information that may be included in Appendix A; all other materials will be removed prior to review of the application.

2. Appendix B: Supplemental Charts, Tables, and Figures (Optional)

Appendix B **must** meet the general formatting guidelines and be **no more than 15 pages**. If Appendix B exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 15th page of the appendix before it is forwarded for scientific peer review. In Appendix B, you may include figures, charts, or tables with supplementary information like a timeline for your research project, a diagram of the management structure of your project, or examples of measures used to collect data for your project such as individual test items, tests, surveys, and observation and interview protocols.

These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix B; all other material will be removed prior to review of the application.

3. Appendix C: Examples of Intervention or Assessment Materials (Optional)

Appendix C **must** meet the general formatting guidelines and be **no more than 10 pages**. If Appendix C exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 10th page of the appendix before it is forwarded for scientific peer review. If you are proposing to explore, develop, evaluate, or validate an intervention or assessment you may include examples of curriculum materials, computer screen shots, assessment items, or other materials used in the intervention or assessment to be explored, developed, evaluated, or validated.

These are the only materials that should be included in Appendix C; all other material will be removed prior to review of the application.

5. Appendix D: Letters of Agreement (Optional)

There is **no recommended page length** for Appendix D. Use this appendix to provide copies of letters of agreement from schools, districts, platform developers, individuals who will serve as consultants, and/or other settings or data sources that will be a part of or will provide data for the proposed research. Ensure that the letters reproduce well so that reviewers can easily read them. Do not reduce the size of the letters. See the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) for guidance regarding the size of file attachments.

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. A common reason projects fail is loss of participating schools and districts. Letters of agreement regarding the provision of data should make it clear that the author of the letter will provide the data described in the application for use in the proposed research and in time to meet the proposed schedule.

IES understands that, due to school closings associated with COVID-19, you may have difficulty providing letters from schools, districts, and other education sites that would participate in or provide data for the proposed research. If you are unable to provide these letters in your application, include a description in Appendix D of why you were not able to obtain letters and your plan for securing them if your application is recommended for funding. **NOTE: Special conditions may be placed on the grant awards if these letters are not received before the award date. Reviewers will be**

instructed to not penalize applicants for failure to include letters of agreement due to the coronavirus pandemic.

These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix D; all other material will be removed prior to review of the application.

6. Appendix E: Data Management Plan (Required for the Adult Skills Research Team only)

If you are applying as a research team under the Adult Skills Network, you **must** include Appendix E. Appendix E must meet the general formatting guidelines and be **no more than five pages**. If Appendix E exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the fifth page of the appendix before it is forwarded for scientific peer review.

The DMP should include the following:

- Identification of the data repository where you will pre-register your study within the first year of the project, following the Standards for Excellence in Education Research (SEER) Principles (<https://ies.ed.gov/seer>)
- Type of data to be shared
- Procedures for managing and for maintaining the confidentiality of Personally Identifiable Information
- Roles and responsibilities of project or organizational staff in the management and retention of research data, including a discussion of any changes to the roles and responsibilities that will occur should the project director/principal investigator and/or co-project directors/co-principal investigators leave the project or their organization
- Expected schedule for data sharing, including how long the data will remain accessible (no later than publication of findings in a peer-reviewed publication and available for at least 10 years) and acknowledgement that the timeframe of data accessibility will be reviewed at the annual progress reviews and revised as necessary
- Format of the final dataset
- Dataset documentation to be provided, including any decisions made about the data that would be important in replicating the results
- Method of data sharing, such as through a data archive, and how those interested in using the data can locate and access them
- Whether or not users will need to sign a data use agreement and, if so, what conditions they must meet
- Any circumstances that prevent all or some of the data from being shared (This includes data that may fall under multiple statutes and, hence, must meet the confidentiality requirements for each applicable statute including data covered by Common Rule for Protection of Human Subjects, FERPA, and HIPAA)

The costs of the DMP can be covered by the grant and should be included in the budget and explained in the budget narrative. IES program officers will be responsible for reviewing the completeness of the proposed DMP. If your application is being considered for funding based on the scores received during the scientific peer review process but your DMP is determined incomplete, you will be required to provide additional detail regarding your DMP.

When the PI and the AOR sign the cover page of the grant application, they will be assuring compliance with IES policy on data sharing as well as other policies and regulations governing research awards. Once the DMP is approved by IES, the PI and the organization are required to carry it out and to report progress and problems through the regular reporting channels. Compliance with IES data sharing requirements is expected even though the final dataset may not be completed and prepared for data sharing until after the grant has been completed. In cases where the PI/grantee is non-compliant with the requirements of the data sharing policy or DMP, subsequent awards to individuals or organizations may be affected. By addressing the items identified above, your DMP describes how you will meet the requirements of the IES policy for data sharing.

This is the only material that should be included in Appendix E; all other material will be removed prior to review of the application.

D. Other Narrative Content

In addition to the project narrative (see [Part II: Research Networks](#)) and required and optional appendices (see above), you will also prepare a project summary/structured abstract, a bibliography and references cited, an exempt or non-exempt research on human subjects narrative, and biographical sketches for key personnel to include as file attachments in your application. See the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) for more information about preparing and submitting your application using the required application package for this competition on Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov/>).

1. Project Summary/Structured Abstract

You **must** submit the project summary/structured abstract as a separate PDF attachment in the application package. If your project is recommended for funding, IES will use this abstract as the basis for the online abstracts that we post when new awards are announced. We recommend that the project summary/structured abstract be two-pages long and follow the format used for IES online abstracts (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/>).

(1) Title

- **Title:** Distinct, descriptive title of the project.
- **Topic and Network Role:** Identify the topic and network role to which you are applying (see [Part II](#)). This information should match the topic and network role codes entered for Item 4b: Agency Routing Number on the SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance form (see the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) and [the topic and project type codes in part VI](#) for more information).

(2) Project Summary

The purpose of the project summary is to provide a high-level overview that is accessible to a range of audiences, such as policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. This section should use short, active sentences to briefly describe the significance of the project, project activities, and the intended outcomes.

- **Purpose:** A brief description of the purpose of the project and its significance for improving education in the United States. This should include why the research is important, what this project will do to address the need, and the general expected outcomes of the project.
- **Project Activities:** An overview of the project activities.
- **Products:** A brief description of the expected products of the project, including the products to be developed and the information that will be learned and disseminated.

(3) Structured Abstract

The purpose of the structured abstract is to provide key details about the project activities. This section is most likely to be used by other researchers but should be written in a way that is accessible to anyone who wants more information about the project.

- **Program of Research** -For each major study, **research teams** should describe the following:
 - Setting
 - Population/Sample
 - Innovation/Factors: a brief description of what will be developed or tested, or a brief description of the factors that will be examined in relation to learner outcomes (for studies that propose exploratory work)
 - Research Design and Methods: A brief description of the major features of the design and methodology.
 - Control Condition (if applicable)
 - Key Measures
 - Data Analytic Strategy
 - Cost Analysis (if applicable, include a brief description of the cost and/or cost effectiveness analyses planned)
- **Program of Activities** -For each major activity study, **network lead and platform development teams** should describe the following:
 - The setting for the activity (if relevant)
 - The stakeholder or audience for the activity (if relevant)
 - Activity structure and goals: a brief description of what the activity entails, its goals, and how its structure is likely to achieve those goals
 - Timeline: a brief description of how long it may take to initiate and/or refine the activity and whether the activity intersects with or is contingent on other activities

2. Bibliography and References Cited

You **must** submit the bibliography and references cited as a separate PDF attachment in the application package. There is **no recommended page length** for the bibliography and references cited. You should include complete citations, including the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), titles of relevant elements such as the article/journal and chapter/book, page numbers, and year of publication for literature cited in the project narrative.

3. Human Subjects Narrative

You **must** submit an exempt or non-exempt human subjects narrative as a separate PDF attachment in the application package. We do not recommend a page length for the human subjects narrative. See

Information About the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by the Department of Education (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/fund/guid/humansub/overview.html>) for a brief overview of the principles, regulations, and policies which affect research involving human subjects supported by the Department of Education.

Note that the Revised Common Rule is now in effect with changes that will affect Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of your proposed research protocol. Take care to address how changes to exemption and continuing review procedures, and the use of a single IRB, will be addressed should your application be recommended for funding.

The U.S. Department of Education does not require certification of IRB approval at the time you submit your application. However, if an application that involves non-exempt human subjects research is recommended for funding, the designated U.S. Department of Education official will request that you obtain and send the certification to the Department within 30 days of the formal request from the Department.

4. Biographical Sketches for Key Personnel

You **must** submit a biographical sketch (an abbreviated CV plus information about current and pending support) for each person named as key personnel in your application. You may also submit biographical sketches for consultants (optional). Each biographical sketch with current and pending support information **must be no more than five pages in length** and follow the general formatting guidelines. If a biographical sketch exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the fifth page before it is forwarded for scientific peer review.

Biographical sketches are submitted as separate PDF attachments in the application package. IES strongly encourages applicants to use SciENcv (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/>) where you will find an IES biosketch form. IES will accept the SciENcv format for your biosketch even though it does not adhere exactly to our general formatting requirements. You may also develop your own biosketch format. If you use SciENcv, the information on current and pending support will be entered into the IES biosketch template. If you use your own format, you will need to provide this information in a separate table.

Be sure to include your ORCID number (Open Researcher and Contributor; <https://orcid.org/>) if you have one and consider establishing one if you have yet to do so.

The biosketch for the principal investigator, each co-principal investigator, and other key personnel should show how key personnel possess expertise commensurate with their specified duties on the proposed project, for example, by describing relevant publications, grants, and research experience.

Provide a list of current and pending grants for the principal investigator, each co-principal investigator, and other key personnel, along with the proportion of their time, expressed as **percent effort over a 12-month calendar year**, allocated to each project. Include the proposed IES grant as one of the pending grants in this list.

Part IV: Competition Regulations and Review Criteria

A. Funding Mechanisms and Restrictions

1. Mechanism of Support

IES intends to award cooperative agreement grants pursuant to this Request for Applications.

2. Funding Available

Although IES intends to support the topics and network roles described in this announcement, all awards pursuant to this Request for Applications are contingent upon the availability of funds and the receipt of meritorious applications. IES makes its awards to the highest quality applications, as determined through scientific peer review.

The size of the award depends on the topic and network role as well as the scope of the project. Please attend to the duration and budget maximums set for each topic and network role in [Part II: Research Networks](#).

3. Special Considerations for Budget Expenses

(a) Indirect Cost Rate

When calculating your expenses for research conducted in field settings, you should apply your organization's federally negotiated off-campus indirect cost rate. Please note that the Indirect Cost Group (ICG) in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of the Chief Financial Officer will not be available for assistance during the application preparation process. If your organization does not have an indirect cost rate and you receive a grant from IES, the ICG group can help with obtaining an indirect cost rate once the grant is awarded.

Organizations, both primary grantees and subawardees, not located in the territorial United States may **not** charge indirect costs.

(b) Meetings and Conferences

If you are requesting funds to cover expenses for hosting meetings or conferences, please note that there are statutory and regulatory requirements in determining whether costs are reasonable and necessary. Please refer to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance), 2 CFR, §200.432 Conferences (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=dcd3efbcf2b6092f84c3b1af32bdcc34&node=se2.1.200_1432&rgn=div8).

Federal grant funds cannot be used to pay for alcoholic beverages or entertainment, which includes costs for amusement, diversion, and social activities. In general, federal funds may not be used to pay for food. A grantee hosting a meeting or conference may not use grant funds to pay for food for conference attendees unless doing so is necessary to accomplish legitimate meeting or conference business. You may request funds to cover expenses for working meetings, such as working lunches; however, IES will determine whether these costs are allowable in keeping with the Uniform Guidance

Cost Principles. Grantees are responsible for the proper use of their grant awards and may have to repay funds to the Department if they violate the rules for meeting- and conference-related expenses or other disallowed expenditures.

4. 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.

5. Applicable Regulations

Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) codified at CFR Part 200. The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 77, 81, 82, 84, 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.

B. Additional Requirements

1. Pre-Award

(a) Clarification and Budget Questions

IES uses the scientific peer review process as the first step in making funding decisions. If your application is recommended for funding based on the outcome of the scientific peer review, an IES program officer will contact you to clarify any issues that were raised by the peer reviewers and to address whether the proposed budget adequately supports the scope of work and meets federal guidelines.

(b) Network Commitments

Below are the commitments that each team will need to agree to as part of its cooperative agreement, which is completed prior to award.

(1) Adult Skills Network Commitments

All members of the Adult Skills Network must agree to the following:

- Co-create and follow a network-wide SEER plan (pre-registration, data management plan, etc.), especially the use of common measures
- Guided by the Network Lead, co-create and implement a network-wide dissemination plan
- Ensure representation at virtual and in-person Adult Skills Network meetings

The Adult Skills Network research teams must also agree to the following:

- Collaborate with the other research teams and Network lead
- Share data and leverage common measures within the network
- Adopt shared coding conventions to the maximum extent possible
- Allow for embedded researchers (such as graduate, postdoctoral, or other researchers or policymakers, for hands-on exposure to research)

The Adult Skills Network Lead must also commit to the following:

- Provide national leadership and outreach that incorporates the findings and activities of the full network
- Ensure the network-wide dissemination plan is enacted and updated as necessary
- Support and promote the work of other network members
- Facilitate opportunities for various stakeholders (education or training programs, researchers, developers, employers, etc.) to meet and collaborate with one another either virtually or in person

(2) Digital Learning Platforms Network Commitments

All members of the Digital Learning Platforms Network must agree to the following:

- Co-create and follow a network-wide SEER plan (pre-registration, data management plan, etc.)
- Guided by the Network Lead, co-create and implement a network-wide dissemination plan
- Ensure representation at virtual and in-person Digital Learning Platforms Network meetings

The Digital Learning Platforms Network platform teams must also agree to the following:

- Collaborate with the other platform teams and the Network Lead, as well as the research teams who will be funded at a later date
- Share data with the participating research teams and agree to the data sharing commitments that the research teams will need to make in order to comply with the IES Policy on Public Access to Data
- Adopt shared measures and coding conventions as relevant

The Digital Learning Platforms Network Lead must also commit to the following:

- Provide national leadership and outreach that incorporates the findings and activities of the full network
- Ensure the network-wide dissemination plan is enacted and updated as necessary
- Support and promote the work of other network members
- Facilitate opportunities for various stakeholders to meet and collaborate with one another either virtually or in person

(c) Demonstrating Access to Data and Education Settings

The research you propose to conduct under a specific topic and network role will most likely require that you have (or will obtain) access to education settings such as classrooms, schools, districts, colleges/universities; secondary datasets; or studies currently under way. In such cases, you will need to provide evidence that you have access to these resources prior to receiving funding. Whenever possible, include letters of agreement in [Appendix D](#) from those who have responsibility for or access to the data or settings you wish to incorporate when you submit your application. Even in circumstances where you have included such letters with your application, **IES will require additional supporting evidence prior to the release of funds.** If you cannot provide such documentation, IES may not award the grant or may withhold funds.

You will need supporting evidence of partnership or access if you are doing any of the following:

(1) Conducting research in or with education settings

If your application is being considered for funding based on scientific merit scores from the scientific peer review panel and your research relies on access to education settings, you will need to provide

documentation that you have access to the necessary settings in order to receive the grant. This means that if you do not have permission to conduct the proposed project in the necessary number of settings at the time of application, you will need to provide documentation to IES indicating that you have successfully recruited the necessary number of settings for the proposed research before the full first-year costs will be awarded. If you recruited sufficient numbers of settings prior to the application, IES will ask you to provide documentation that the settings originally recruited for the application are still willing to partner in the research.

(2) Using secondary datasets

If your application is being considered for funding based on scientific merit scores from the scientific peer review panel and your research relies on access to secondary datasets (such as federally collected datasets, state or district administrative data, or data collected by you or other researchers), you will need to provide documentation that you have access to the necessary datasets in order to receive the grant. This means that if you do not have permission to use the proposed datasets at the time of application, you must provide documentation to IES from the entity controlling the dataset(s) before the grant will be awarded. This documentation must indicate that you have permission to use the data for the proposed research for the time period discussed in the application. If you obtained permission to use a proposed dataset prior to submitting your application, IES will ask you to provide updated documentation indicating that you still have permission to use the dataset to conduct the proposed research during the project period.

(3) Building on existing studies

You may propose studies that piggyback onto an ongoing study, which will require access to those subjects and data. In such cases, the principal investigator of the existing study should be one of the members of the research team applying for the grant to conduct the new project.

In addition to obtaining evidence of access, IES strongly advises applicants to establish a written agreement, within 3 months of receipt of an award, among all key collaborators and their organizations (including principal and co-principal investigators) regarding roles, responsibilities, access to data, publication rights, and decision making procedures.

(d) Assessment of Past Performance

IES considers the applicant's performance and use of funds under a previous federal award as part of the criteria for making a funding decision. Performance on previous Department of Education awards is considered as is additional information that may be requested from the applicant, including compliance to the IES Public Access Policy (applicable for all grants funded from 2012 to present; <https://ies.ed.gov/funding/researchaccess.asp>).

2. Post Award

(a) Compliance with IES Policy on Public Access to Data and Results

(1) Access to data

If you are applying as a Research Team under the Adult Skills Network, you must include a data management plan (DMP) in [Appendix E](#). The scientific peer review process will not include the DMP in the scoring of the scientific merit of the application. Instead, IES program officers will be responsible

for reviewing the completeness of the proposed DMP. The costs of the DMP can be covered by the grant and should be included in the budget and explained in the budget narrative.

(2) Access to results: Grantee submissions to ERIC

IES requires all grantees to submit the electronic version of peer-reviewed scholarly publications to ERIC (<https://eric.ed.gov/>), a publicly accessible and searchable electronic database of education research that makes available full-text documents to the public for free. This public access requirement (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/researchaccess.asp>) applies to peer-reviewed, original scholarly publications that have been supported (in whole or in part) with direct funding from IES, although it does not apply to book chapters, editorials, reviews, or non-peer-reviewed conference proceedings. **As the designated representative for the grantee organization, IES holds the principal investigator responsible** for ensuring that authors of publications stemming from the grant comply with this requirement.

The author's final manuscript is defined as the final version accepted for journal publication and includes all modifications from the peer review process. Submission of accepted manuscripts for public accessibility through ERIC is strongly encouraged as soon as possible **but must occur within 12 months of the publisher's official date of publication.** ERIC will not make the accepted manuscripts available to the public prior to the end of the 12-month embargo period, unless specified by the publisher.

The ERIC website includes a homepage for the Grantee and Online Submission System (<https://eric.ed.gov/submit/>), as well as a Frequently Asked Questions page (<https://eric.ed.gov/?granteefaq>). During the submission process, authors will submit bibliographic information from the publication, including title, authors, publication date, journal title, and associated IES award number(s).

(b) Pre-Register Studies (Adult Skills Network Research Teams Only)

Adult Skills Network Research Teams must register any exploratory or causal impact studies on a suitable platform within the first year of receiving a new award. There are several options for preregistration including the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies (REES; <https://sreereg.icpsr.umich.edu/sreereg/>), the Open Science Framework (OSF; <https://osf.io/>), ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://clinicaltrials.gov/>), The American Economic Association's Registry for Randomized Controlled Trials (AEA RCT Registry; <https://www.socialscienceregistry.org>), EGAP (<https://egap.org/content/registration>), Uri Simonsohn's As Predicted (<https://aspredicted.org/>), and trial registries in the World Health Organization (WHO) Registry Network (<https://www.who.int/ictrp/network/en/>).

(c) Special Conditions on Grants

IES may impose special conditions on a grant pertinent to the proper implementation of key aspects of the proposed research design or if the grantee is not financially stable, has a history of unsatisfactory performance, has an unsatisfactory financial or other management system, has not fulfilled the conditions of a prior grant, or is otherwise not responsible.

(d) Attendance at the Annual IES Principal Investigators Meeting

The principal investigator (PI) is required to attend one meeting each year (for up to 3 days) in Washington, DC with other IES grantees and IES staff. The project's budget should include this meeting. PIs who are not able to attend the meeting may designate another person who is key personnel on the research team to attend.

C. Overview of Application and Scientific Peer Review Process

1. Submitting Your Letter of Intent

Letters of intent (LOIs) are submitted online at the IES Peer Review Information Management Online (PRIMO) system (<https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit>). **Select the Letter of Intent form for the competition under which you plan to submit your application.** The online submission form contains fields for each of the seven content areas listed below. Use these fields to provide the requested information. The project description should be single-spaced and is recommended to be no more than one page (about 3,500 characters). The LOI is non-binding and optional but strongly recommended. If you submit an LOI, a program officer will contact you regarding your proposed research. IES staff also use the information in the LOI to identify the expertise needed for the scientific peer review panels and to secure a sufficient number of reviewers to handle the anticipated number of applications.

Elements for the Letter of Intent:

- Descriptive title
- Topic and network role of your application
- Brief description of the proposed project
- Name, organizational affiliation, address, telephone number, and email address of the principal investigator and any co-principal investigators
- Name and organizational affiliation of any key collaborators and contractors
- Duration of the proposed project (attend to the Duration maximums for each topic and network role)
- Estimated total budget request (attend to the Budget maximums for each topic and network role)

2. Multiple Submissions

You may submit applications to more than one of the FY 2021 IES grant programs and to multiple topics or roles within the Education Research Networks Grants competition. In addition, within a particular grant program or topic, you may submit multiple applications. However, you may submit a given application only once for the FY 2021 grant competitions, meaning you may not submit the same application or similar applications to multiple grant programs, multiple topics, or multiple times within the same topic. If you submit the same or similar applications, IES will determine whether and which applications will be accepted for review and/or will be eligible for funding.

If you have already submitted an application to an FY 2021 IES grant competition that is the same or similar to an application you would like to submit to this FY 2021 Education Research Networks competition, you may **contact the IES Peer Review Help Desk (IESHelp@prsmhosting.com)** to withdraw your already submitted application from consideration. You may then submit the same or a

similar application to this FY 2021 Networks competition. IES strongly encourages applicants to make such withdrawal requests **no later than December 31, 2020**.

3. Application Processing

Applications must be submitted electronically and received no later than 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 25, 2021 through the internet using the software provided on the Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov/>) website. You must follow the application procedures and submission requirements described in the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) and on Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov/>).

After applications are fully uploaded and validated at Grants.gov, the U.S. Department of Education receives the applications for processing and transfer to the IES PRIMO system (<https://iesreview.ed.gov/>). PRIMO allows applicants to track the progress of their application via the Applicant Notification System (ANS).

Approximately 1 to 2 weeks after the application deadline, invitation emails are sent to applicants who have never applied to IES before to create their individual PRIMO ANS accounts. Both the PI and the AOR will receive invitation emails. Approximately 4 to 6 weeks after the application deadline, all applicants (new and existing ANS users) will begin to receive a series of emails about the status of their application. See the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) for additional information about ANS and PRIMO.

Once an application has been submitted and the application deadline has passed, you may not submit additional materials or information for inclusion with your application.

4. Scientific Peer Review Process

IES will forward all applications that are compliant and responsive to this Request for Applications to be evaluated for scientific and technical merit. Scientific reviews are conducted in accordance with the review criteria stated below and the review procedures posted on the IES website (https://ies.ed.gov/director/sro/application_review.asp) by a panel of experts who have substantive and methodological expertise appropriate to the program of research and Request for Applications.

Each compliant and responsive application is assigned to an IES review panel convened for this competition.

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, IES calculates an average overall score for each application and prepares a preliminary rank order of applications 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 application that he or she believes merits full panel review but that would not have been included in the full panel meeting based on its preliminary rank order.

5. Review Criteria for Scientific Merit

The purpose of IES-supported research is to contribute to solving education problems and provide reliable information about the education practices that support learning and improve academic achievement and access to education for all learners. IES expects reviewers to assess the scientific rigor and practical significance of the research proposed in order to judge the likelihood that it will make a meaningful contribution to the larger IES mission. Information about each of these criteria is described in Part II. Review criteria are listed below by network role.

(a) Research Teams (Adult Skills Network only)

(1) Significance

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Significance section for the Adult Skills Network topic?

(2) Research Plan

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Research Plan section for the Adult Skills Network topic?

(3) Personnel

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Personnel section for the Adult Skills Network topic? Do the principal investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess appropriate experience, and will they commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed research?

(4) Resources

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Resources section for the Adult Skills Network topic? 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?

(5) Dissemination

Does the application address the recommendations described in Appendix A: Dissemination History and Plan? Does the applicant present a dissemination plan that is tailored to the purpose of the project and designed to reach a wide range of audiences? Does the applicant describe a dissemination history that demonstrates past success in sharing results of education research widely and appropriately?

(b) Platform Teams (Digital Learning Platforms Network only)

(1) Significance

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Significance section for the Digital Learning Platforms Network topic?

(2) Platform Development Plan

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Platform Development Plan section for the Digital Learning Platforms Network topic?

(3) Personnel

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Personnel section for the Digital Learning Platforms Network topic? Do the principal investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess appropriate experience, and will they commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed work?

(4) Resources

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Resources section for the Digital Learning Platforms Network topic? 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?

(c) Network Lead (Both Adult Skills Network and Digital Learning Platforms Network)

(1) Significance

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Significance section for the topic under which the applicant is submitting the application?

(2) Network Lead Activities

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Network Lead Activities section for the topic under which the applicant is submitting the application?

(3) Personnel

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Personnel section for the topic under which the applicant is submitting the application? Do the principal investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess appropriate experience, and will they commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed activities?

(4) Resources

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Resources section for the topic under which the applicant is submitting the application? 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?

6. Award Decisions

The following will be considered in making award decisions for responsive and compliant applications:

- Scientific merit as determined by scientific peer review
- Performance and use of funds under a previous federal award
- Contribution to the overall program of research described in this request for applications
- Ability to carry out the proposed research within the maximum award and duration requirements
- Availability of funds

Part V: Compliance and Responsiveness Checklist

Only compliant and responsive applications will be forwarded for scientific peer review. Use this checklist to better ensure you have included all required components for compliance and that you have addressed all general and project narrative requirements for responsiveness.

See the IES Application Submission Guide (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>) for an application checklist that describes the forms in the application package that must be completed and the PDF files that must be attached to the forms for a successful submission through Grants.gov.

Compliance	
	Have you included a Project Narrative?
	Have you included Appendix A: Dissemination History and Plan if you are applying to the Adult Skills Network Research Team role?
	Have you included Appendix E: Data Management Plan if you are applying to the Adult Skills Network Research Team role?
Responsiveness	
	Have you met all the Requirements for an application?
	Does your proposed research include measures of academic outcomes?
	Is your project relevant to education in the United States and does it address factors under the control of U.S. education systems?
	Have you indicated a single topic for your application?
	Have you indicated a single network role for your application?
	Does your Project Narrative include the required sections and the associated requirements for the selected topic and network role? Did you describe the elements required for each section as listed below?

(table continues on the following page)

Required Project Narrative Elements			
Adult Skills Research Teams			
Significance	Research Plan	Personnel	Resources
<p>You must describe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The academic outcome(s) your study focuses on (see Part I.B.1) The technology component of your study Your study’s research questions 	<p>You must describe the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristics of your sample or data source, which must include adult learners with low basic skills and/or academic attainment gaps Research design and methods for your study or studies The cost analysis plan for implementing an intervention, if you propose to develop one The cost analysis plan and the cost-effectiveness plan for the intervention, if you propose to test the impact of an intervention Data analysis plan for your study or studies 	<p>You must describe your project team.</p>	<p>You must describe your resources to conduct the project.</p>
Adult Skills Network Lead			
Significance	Network Activities	Personnel	Management and Organizational Resources
<p>You must describe why your proposed goals are important for addressing issues related to improving adult basic skills or academic attainment.</p>	<p>You must describe your plans for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing and monitoring network goals Meeting with network members National leadership and dissemination, which must include establishing a website and social media presence within the first year and conducting engagement activities 	<p>You must describe your project team.</p>	<p>You must describe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans and procedures for the overall management of the Adult Skills Network Resources to conduct the work of the Adult Skills Network

(table continues on the following page)

Digital Learning Platform Teams			
Significance	Platform Development Plan	Personnel	Resources
You must describe the characteristics of your platform to demonstrate that it meets the request for application's definition of a widely used digital learning platform	<p>You must describe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The features, portals, dashboards, data-sharing tools, and/or other system components that will be developed to support the implementation of research studies in collaboration with researchers and education stakeholders • Plans to collect feedback from users (such as learners, educators, and researchers) to iteratively improve the platform • Plans to test the feasibility of implementing the revised platform for research purposes and to examine the usability of the revised platform 	You must describe your project team.	You must describe your resources to conduct the project.
Digital Learning Platforms Network Lead			
Significance	Network Activities	Personnel	Management and Organizational Resources
You must describe how your vision for the Digital Learning Platforms Network fits with IES's goals.	<p>You must describe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Year 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plans for convening virtual and in person meetings to establish an understanding of what is needed to facilitate effective collaborations amongst digital learning platform developers, researchers, and education stakeholders ○ Plans to summarize research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge generated from the convenings through white papers and short briefs ○ Plans to begin recruiting a network of education partners who are interested in participating in research using the digital learning platforms that are the focus of the platform teams ○ Plans for a website and a social media strategy • For the remaining years of the network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plans for virtual and in person meetings with network members and for establishing and monitoring network goals ○ Plans for continuing to summarize and share out research relevant to the broad goals of the network and knowledge gained from network activities through white papers and short briefs ○ Plans for continuing communications using a website and social media ○ Plans for disseminating the findings from the research generated by the network 	You must describe your project team.	<p>You must describe the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans and procedures for the overall management of the Digital Learning Platforms Network • Resources to conduct the work of the Digital Learning Platforms Network

Part VI: Topic and Project Type Codes

Applications to the **Research Networks Focused on Critical Problems of Policy and Practice (CFDA 84.305N) program** are submitted under a single topic and a single network role. You must enter the appropriate topic and network role code in Item 4b of the SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance form (see the IES Application Submission Guide, <https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>, for more information about this form). For example, an application under the Adult Skills Network topic and the Network Lead role should have the code “NCER-AS Lead” entered in the field for Item 4b.

Topics	Codes
Adult Skills Network	NCER-AS
Digital Learning Platforms Network	NCER-DLP

Network Role	Codes
Network Lead	Lead
Research Team (Adult Skills Network only)	Research
Platform Team (Digital Learning Platforms Network only)	Platform