

# ***Building Adult Skills and Attainment Through Technology Research Network FY 2021 - CFDA: 84.305N***

**Contact:**

Dr. Meredith Larson

**[Meredith.Larson@ed.gov](mailto:Meredith.Larson@ed.gov)**

National Center for Education Research

Institute of Education Sciences

# Word of caution and notes about IES funding

This presentation cannot cover all the requirements specified in the Request for Applications. Please refer to that document for the full rules to ensure you have a complete application and could, therefore, go forward to peer review.

IES uses a scientific process with external peer reviewers to determine whether applications score well enough to be considered for funding. The program officer does not influence these decisions and can, therefore, work with applicants.

# What this presentation covers

- Description of Research Networks and IES's vision for the Adult Skills Network
- Overview of the Research Team components of the Network
- Overview of the Research Lead component of the Network
- Resources and next steps



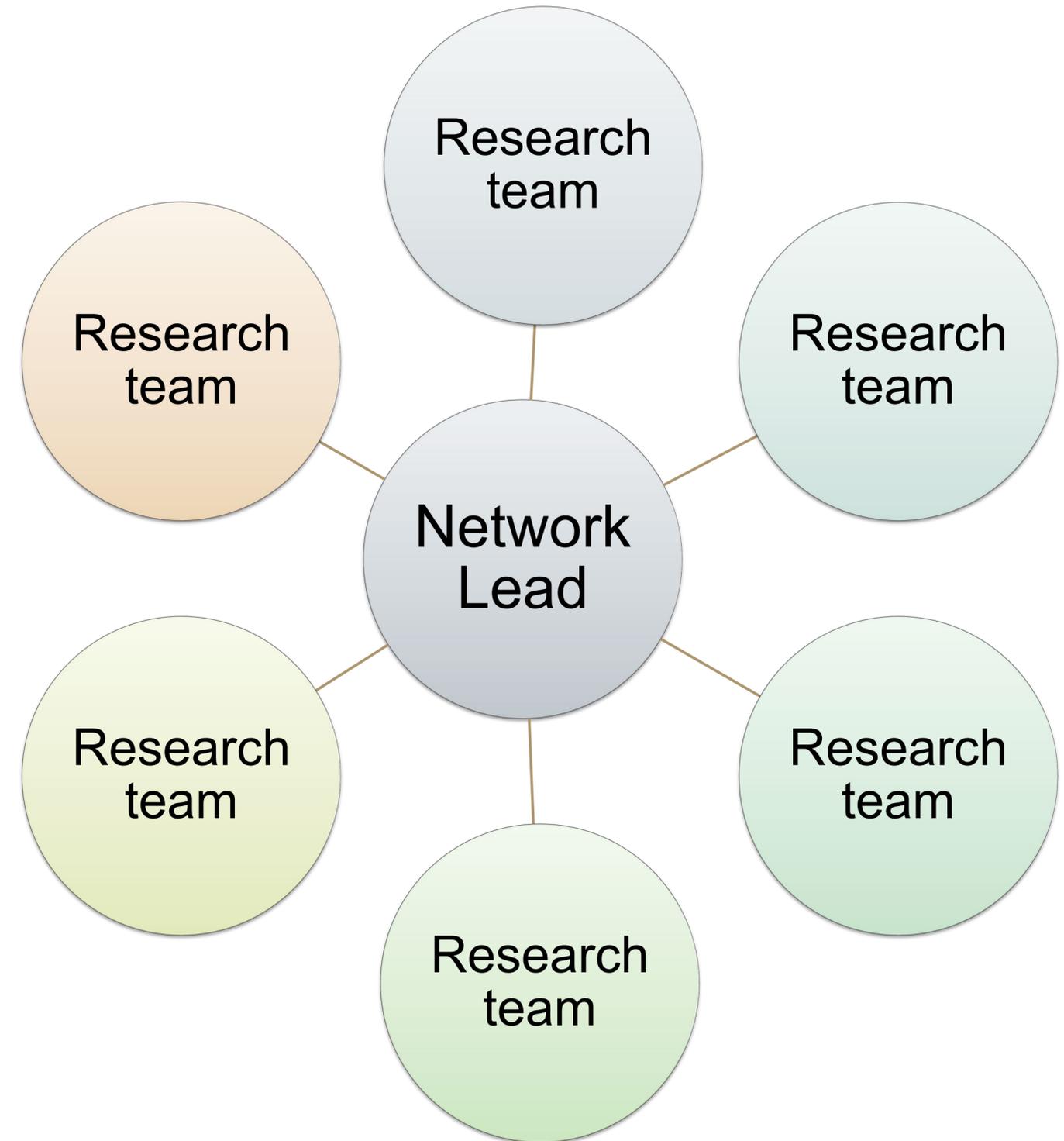
IES is always interested in finding possible reviewers.

If you would like to volunteer to be a potential reviewer, please go to the **IES Standards and Review website: <https://iesreview.ed.gov/ReviewerRecruitment>**

# What is a “Research Network”?

## IES Research Networks –

- Focus resources and attention on education issues of national importance
- Create a structure and a process to help different research teams build knowledge, strengthen dissemination, and share ideas



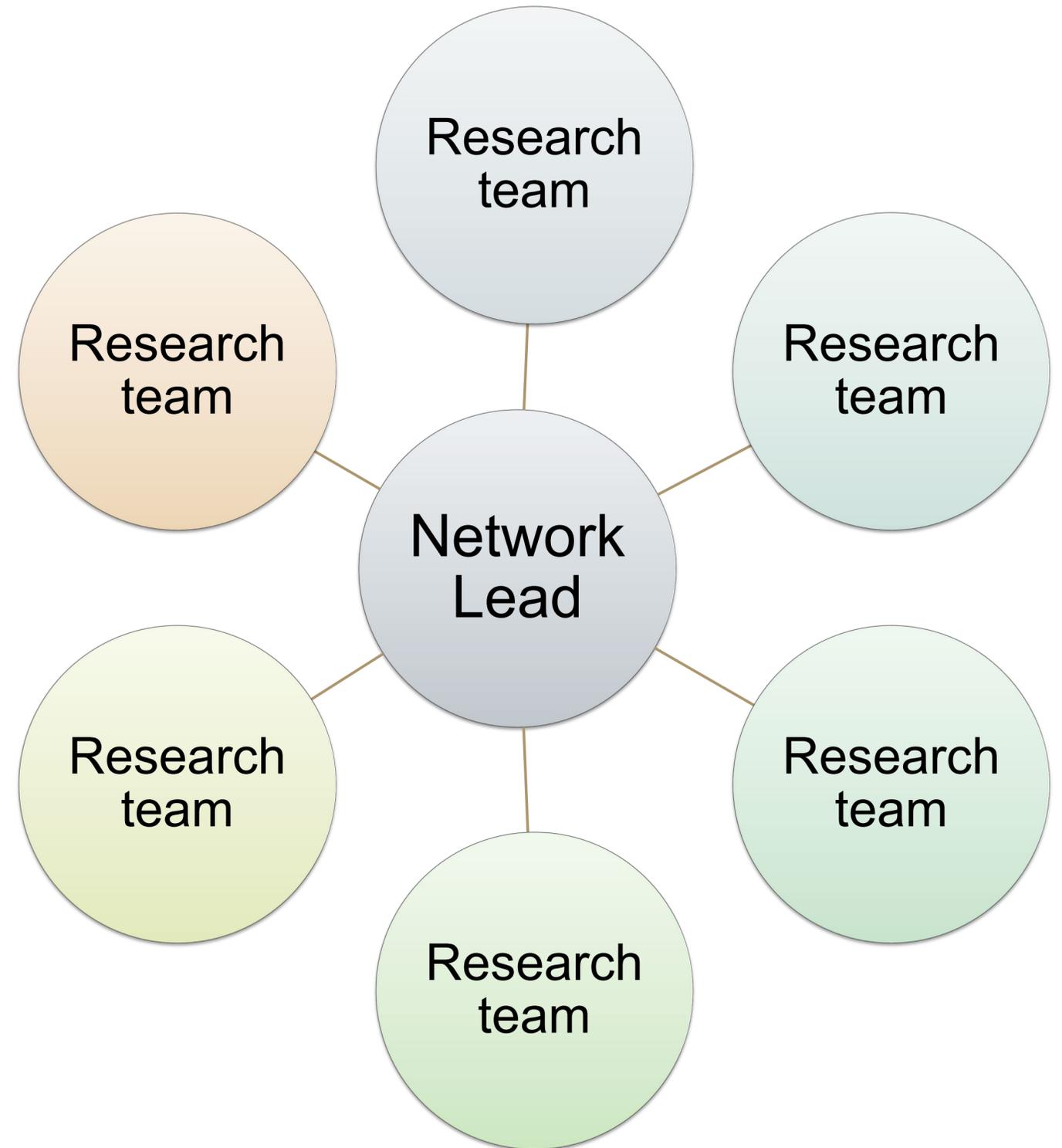
# How do Research Networks work?

## The Network Lead

- Helps coordinate and guide dissemination and facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Conducts additional research/dissemination work of its own

## The Research Teams

- Have distinct projects that may vary in size, project type (exploration, evaluation, etc.)
- Are similar in some aspect relevant to the theme of the Network



# What does IES mean by “Adult Basic Skills and Attainment”?

*Adult basic skills* refer to core competencies such as reading, writing, numeracy, and English language proficiency. *Attainment* refers to attaining a high-school equivalency degree and beyond.

Network members’ work should be relevant to one or more “Adult Education Academic Outcomes” as defined in the RFA.

You may also include outcomes relevant to learners in other education systems, such as postsecondary or career/technical education programs.

IES encourages additional outcomes as relevant, such as employment.

**Academic Outcomes for Adult Education**  
achievement in literacy, English language proficiency, and/or numeracy, as well as access to, persistence in, progress through, and completion of adult education courses and programs  
(RFA, pg. 2)

# What does IES intend by “Technology”?

IES is intentionally broad in its definition of *technology* for this competition.

We refer to technology-supported innovations, education technology, the Internet, the skills and competencies necessary to use these things for learning purposes, etc.

We do not specify a particular type or set of technologies, leaving it to the applicants to make an argument for the technology component they identify.

## Examples:

- 
- Mobile apps for learners or educators
  - Automated tutoring systems
  - Computer-adaptive testing
  - Wikis, social media, Web 2.0 tools
  - Online/hybrid learning models
  - Learners’/Educators’ skills with technological tools
  - Learning management systems
-

# What are some overarching rules or considerations?

- Your activities must include academic outcomes (RFA pg. 2)
- Your work must be relevant to U.S. education settings (RFA pg. 3)
- You must attend to the application requirement for the position you're applying for (research team or network lead) (RFA Part II)
- You must submit your application in full by the due date (RFA pg. 5)

If you are **late or fail to include a required component including require appendices** (RFA Part III), IES may not forward your application for external peer review.

See the RFA for more information about the required components.

# What are important dates for applicants to remember?

Item	Date	URL
<b>RFA available</b>	December 10, 2020	<a href="https://ies.ed.gov/funding/21rfas.asp">https://ies.ed.gov/funding/21rfas.asp</a>
<b>Grants.gov package available</b>	December 17, 2020	<a href="https://www.grants.gov">https://www.grants.gov</a>
<b>Letters of Intent</b>	January 7, 2020	<a href="https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit">https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit</a>
<b>Applications due</b>	February 25, 2021 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Time	<a href="https://www.grants.gov">https://www.grants.gov</a>
<b>Possible Start Dates</b>	August 1 – September 1, 2021	

# Answers to a few common questions

*Can applications include more than one organizations as part of the research team or the network lead?*

**Yes** – an application can have more than one organization

*Can the same organization be on more than one application?*

**Yes** – an organization and even the same individuals can be on multiple applications

*Can organizations not based in the U.S. apply for funding as a prime or subawardee?*

**Yes** – however, organizations outside the US may not request funds for indirect costs

## A few answers to common questions (part 2)

*Will IES consider applications that were submitted to a different FY 2021 competition for this one?*

**No** – IES cannot consider something submitted to a different competition for this one. **HOWEVER**, those who submitted to an earlier FY 2021 competition may submit applications for different work, or they may ask to withdraw a previous application and then submit the same or a revised version for this RFA. If you want to consider this, contact Meredith with questions and see page 40-41 of the RFA.

*Can applicants talk with IES staff about the competition or their applications?*

**Yes** – I will be available to give technical assistance to applicants as much as possible, and there is a free Cost Analysis Help Desk that can work with applicants who need to conduct a cost study.

# Adult Skills Research Teams

# Quick overview of maximums and rules for research teams

## Maximums

- **5 years** – Typical range might be 3 to 5 years activities
- **\$3,800,000** (total cost = direct + indirect costs) – The amount should match the work proposed.

## Award Type

These are cooperative agreement grants, meaning that funded teams will work cooperatively with IES throughout the project.

## Number of Projects

- 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.

See **Part IV** of the RFA details the relevant Competition Regulations and Review Criteria.

**Part IV.B.b.** describes the particular commitments network members will make.

# What types of projects can the research teams conduct?

IES is intentionally broad in what it will accept for this competition. It is not requiring, for example, that all projects be impact studies.

Common project types may include –

- Mixed methods exploratory work
- Secondary data analysis
- Iterative development/refinement of a new or existing intervention
- Development/validation of an assessment or measure
- Causal impact studies
- Implementation studies
- Mixtures of the above

When in doubt, ask Meredith.

If your project type would fit under the 305A program, it would probably also fit here.

# What types of research questions are possible?

## Things to note:

1. The research must be relevant to the adult education system (e.g., your findings would help students, educators, or administrators in these programs achieve a goal)
2. Your sample must include data from adults with low basic skills and/or low academic attainment
3. Technology must be an aspect of your work (e.g., part of your research questions)

You could focus on helping **students**, helping **educators** (tutors, instructors, etc.), helping **programs and providers**, as long as you can link it back to the theme of the network.

You can go beyond the required elements and include other populations or settings (e.g., workforce training, postsecondary) or other outcomes (e.g., wages, civic engagement).

# What must research teams include in the narrative to be reviewed?

In your application, you must discuss

- The **academic outcome(s)** your study focuses on
- The **technology component** of your study
- Your **research design, methods, and analysis plan**, which must include the characteristics of your sample or data source and a cost analysis plan for implementing an intervention (if you propose developing one) or a cost analysis and cost-effectiveness plan for the intervention, if you propose to test the impact of an intervention
- Your team's **personnel**
- Your **resources** to conduct the project

See **Part V** of the RFA for a checklist of all the components you need to include with your application.

The **IES Application Submission Guide** will also help.

Be sure to include the required appendices and to attend to page limits.

# Any tips to help applications be more competitive?

- Consider your reviewers and what they might be used to
  - Use words and terms in the RFAs when possible
  - If you must use jargon, acronyms, or abbreviations, define them and try to keep them to a minimum
- A visual representation of your theoretical framework or of how your intervention may help the learners, educators, etc. move from point A to point B can be helpful (aka “theory of change” or “logic model”)
- Identify a real-world problem or pain point (e.g., a struggle educators or learners have) and show how your work can help
- Build a team that has all the types of experience needed – this team is likely to include non-researchers, such as educators, program administrators, etc.

See **Part II.2.f**  
for a fuller  
list of  
recommendations  
aligned to the  
different sections of  
the application  
narrative

# Are there any resources for technical assistance?

- **Cost Analysis Help Desk and IES Resources**

- You can refer to the expectations listed in other RFAs to give you a sense of what reviewers may look for.
  - For **development-type projects** and for **initial tests of an intervention’s impact**, see [CFDA 84.305A](#) (Development and Innovation and the Initial Efficacy project types)
  - For **replications of causal impact projects** that meet the requirements of “replication”, see [CFDA 84.305R](#)
- You can reach out to the IES-funded [Cost Analysis Help Desk](#) to get individualized feedback.
- There are also online documents at the following site to help: [https://ies.ed.gov/seer/cost\\_analysis.asp](https://ies.ed.gov/seer/cost_analysis.asp)

- **The Program Officer**

- Meredith can speak with applicants about their proposals and may have time to review sections of drafts
- Meredith will provide this assistance from now until **Friday, February 12, 2021.**

# Adult Skills Network Lead

# Quick overview of maximums and rules for network lead applications

## Maximums

- **5 years** – given that the lead should operate throughout the lifespan of the network, most applicants are likely to request the maximum
- **\$3,000,000** (total cost = direct costs + indirect costs) – just as with the research team applications, make sure that the funds are commensurate with the proposed work

## Award Type

These are cooperative agreement grants, meaning that funded teams will work cooperatively with IES throughout the project.

## Number of Awards

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

See **Part IV** of the RFA details the relevant Competition Regulations and Review Criteria.

**Part IV.B.b.** describes the particular commitments network members will make.

# What must network lead applicants include in the narrative?

In your application, you must discuss

- Your goals for addressing adult basic skills/attainment issues
- Your activities for network coordination management and national leadership and dissemination, which must include establishing a website and social media presence and conduction engagement activities
- Your team's **personnel**
- Your **resources** to conduct the project

See **Part V** of the RFA for a checklist of all the components you need to include with your application.

The **IES Application Submission Guide** will also help.

Be sure to include the required appendices and to attend to page limits.

# What is meant by *engagement activities*?

## Interactive activity/activities

**Goal:** facilitate interaction and participation among stakeholders, such as learners, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and/or developers

**Examples:** webinars or online professional development series, databases for researchers and programs to build research teams, a Help Desk that provides information about particular topics, etc.

## More 'static' activity/activities

**Goal:** summarize or curate existing information or tools relevant to adult skills, attainment, and technology

**Examples:** a series of working papers, a database of learning technologies for adults, videos demonstrating evidence-based teaching practices for adult education providers

You could blend the interactive and more static activities  
Just make sure reviewers understand that you're  
combining them and why.

# Any tips to make an application more competitive?

- Avoid jargon and terminology and try to use words or organizational cues in the RFA
- Consider having visuals that depict how you see your role within the network and as a national leader intersecting and unfolding over time (could be more than one graphic and could be included in the appendix)
- Clearly describe the stakeholder groups outside of the network that you feel you would be able to engage and serve and highlight their importance to the overarching issue
- If you have multiple organizations involved or will have advisors from outside your organization, help reviewers understand their contribution and how you will manage the complexity

See **Part II.3.f**  
for a fuller  
list of  
recommendations  
aligned to the  
different sections  
of the application  
narrative

# Are there any resources for network lead technical assistance?

Because the Network Lead position and its role and requirements is unique for each IES-supported Research Network, there is no single model or single source for examples.

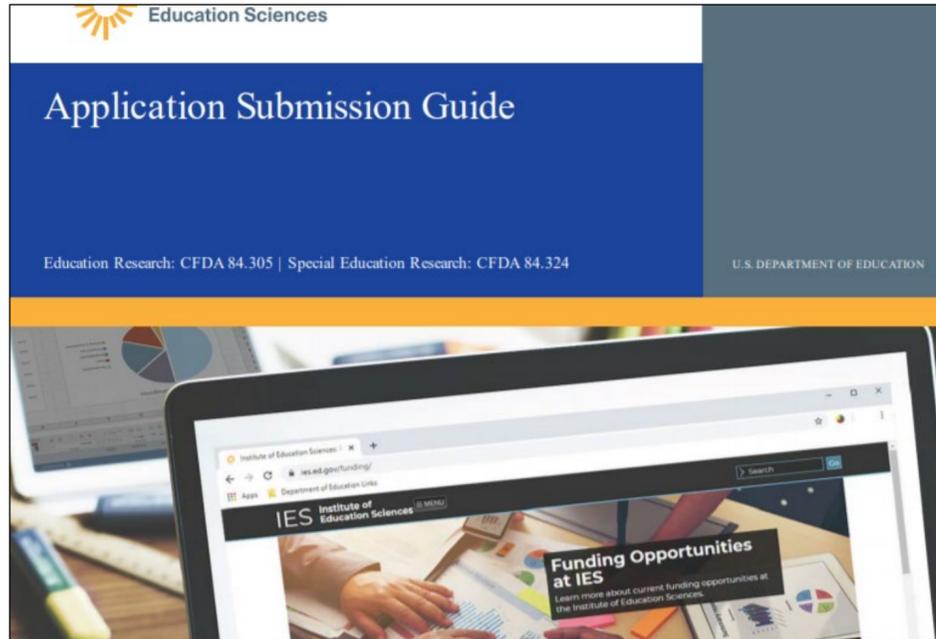
The best resource to help you ensure you have the basics is the RFA.

The second resource to consider is the program officer:

- Meredith can speak with applicants about their proposals and may have time to review sections of drafts
- Meredith will provide this assistance from now until **Friday, February 12, 2021.**

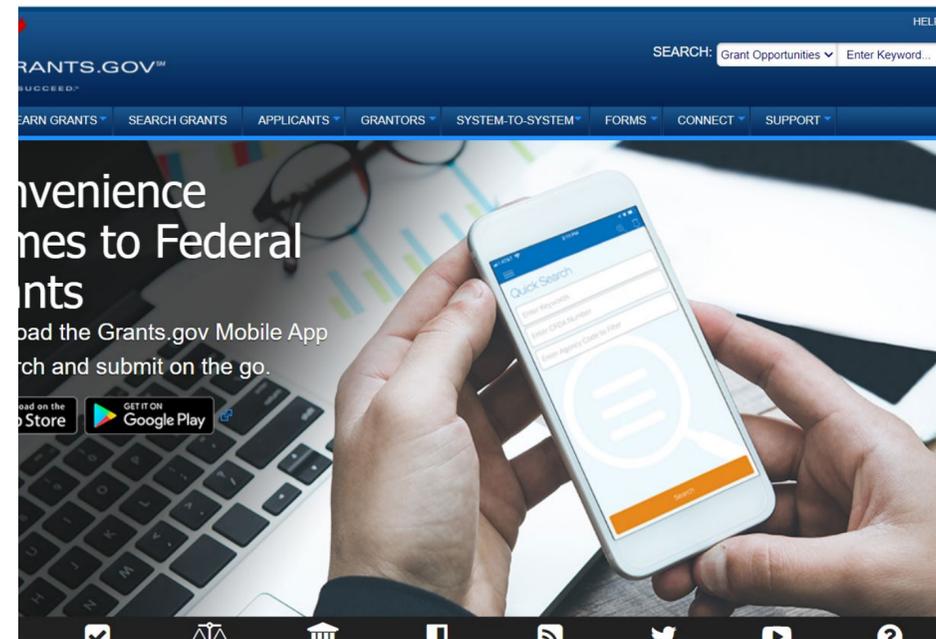
# Resources and Next Steps

# Things to have on hand



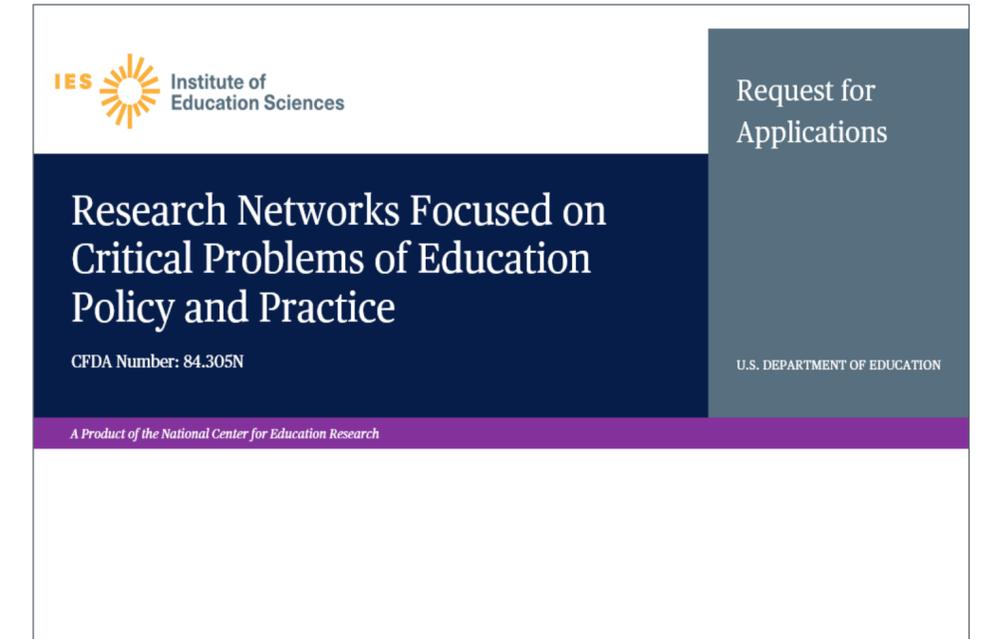
The **IES Application Submission Guide** will help organizations and principal investigators submit applications correctly

<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/submissionguide.pdf>



**Grants.gov** has many tools and its own help desk to help organizations and individuals submit federal grant applications. Make sure you have your accounts set up for all the necessary systems as soon as possible!

<https://grants.gov>



The **RFA** will help you make sure you know what you need to include in the application (e.g., appendices) so that you move forward to peer review

[https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/2021\\_84305N.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/funding/pdf/2021_84305N.pdf)

# Reasons why an applications may not be successful



## **Things that could stop your application from being peer reviewed**

- Submitted late
- Submitted without required appendices or documents
- Application narrative does not clearly have the require components

## **Things that might confuse peer reviewers**

- The narrative does not clearly specify the significance of the work you propose
- The research plan or the project activities do not seem to connect to the significance section of your application
- The proposed staff do not match the components of the work you propose (e.g., if you say you are developing a tool for educators/instructors but no such people are on your team or you say that you will conduct social media outreach but have not noted such experience in any of the team members)

# Next steps

- Download copies of the RFA and Submission Guide
- Submit a letter of intent (not required but encouraged – will help us with communications and planning)
- Get your team together
- Reach out to the program officer (Dr. Meredith Larson)
- Mark your calendar with important dates

# Final thoughts on adult skills at IES

IES continues to be committed to improving the research base to support adults with low basic skills and/or academic attainment gaps and the people and programs that aim to support these adults.

This research network is just one of the ways IES is investing in this research base.

Even after this competition, IES will want members of the field to submit applications for research projects, volunteer as possible reviewers for future competitions, and reach out to IES staff for information and to make us aware of your needs.

Thank you for your current interest and your future input.