

## IES NCER FY24 305N RFA: CTE Research Teams

### Frequently Asked Questions

***Q: Does the setting have to be a school district?***

A: Yes, the setting must be a school district. You can also include other partners, such as other districts in the region, a state, or a college. Please note:

- You must include a letter of support from the district that agrees to be the setting for the exploratory study. (To ensure a variety of available career development opportunities and a large enough sample size to examine learner subgroups, IES recommends a medium or large urban or suburban district). You may also include letters of support from other partners, if applicable (see the Recommendations in the Resources section of the RFA).
- The career development opportunity(ies) must be offered at the secondary (middle or high school) education level in the district. However, you can also examine postsecondary outcomes of the students who experienced the career development opportunity in high school, if you can collect such data within the 3-year time period for the impact study.

***Q: Do I have to focus on one career development opportunity?***

A: Not for the exploratory study in Year 1; in fact, for the exploratory study, IES is expecting applicants to propose to gather data on multiple career development opportunities in the district to understand what the offerings are, who uses them, and how they might be related to learner outcomes. For the impact study in Years 2-4, IES expects applicants to focus on one career development opportunity.

***Q: Can I study a career development opportunity as implemented in a whole state?***

A: Technically, yes, as long as you focus on a single large district first in the exploratory study to describe the variety of career development opportunities it offers. Then, you can plan to conduct your causal impact study of a career development opportunity as implemented in one or more districts in the state. Your budget may limit how geographically broad your focus can be for the impact study.

***Q: Do the settings for the exploration and impact studies need to be the same?***

A: No, you can use a different setting for the impact study if you find, during Year 1 of the grant, that the setting for the exploratory study does not provide a career development opportunity that can be studied using a causal design or does not have a large enough sample size or variability.

***Q: How will IES make sure there isn't duplication of research?***

A: As stated in the RFA, "IES does not intend to fund more than one project in a given setting." The intent of this grant program is for the network research teams to begin to "document the national landscape of secondary school career development opportunities and what works best for whom." Thus, IES is hoping to fund applications to study districts from around the country. For the impact study, the research plans (due in Year 1 of the grant) will be reviewed by the Network Lead to ensure variation across settings and coherence of career development opportunity focus across the 5 research teams.

***Q: Is IES expecting the impact studies to meet WWC standards without reservations?***

A: Not necessarily: Impact studies could also meet WWC standards with reservations. As stated in the RFA, "Explain what type of research design you would likely recommend for an impact study and why. Causal impact can be tested using either an experimental or quasi-experimental design that is eligible to meet the IES What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) design standards. IES expects applicants to use the strongest research design available to address your proposed impact questions for the career development opportunity you are testing."

Also note that the RFA states: "For both the exploratory and the impact studies, a variety of approaches are appropriate, including (1) primary data collection and analyses, (2) secondary data analyses, or (3) some combination of these two approaches."

***Q: How can I provide enough detail about the impact study research plan if I don't yet know what it will focus on?***

A: As stated in the RFA: "For this application, IES does not expect the level of detail that would be expected for an Impact study under its Education Research Grants program (ALN 84.305A). Rather, IES and its reviewers want to understand your approach to conducting an impact evaluation and feel confident that you have thought through the major design and measurement challenges. In the Personnel and Resources sections of the proposal, reviewers will also look for your experience and capacity to conduct an impact evaluation."

***Q: If I already know which career development opportunity I want to study, can I use the exploratory year to prepare for the conduct of the impact study?***

A: No, the purpose of the exploratory study is not simply to select the career development opportunity you want to focus on in the impact study. The main purpose of the 5 research teams conducting exploratory, descriptive studies in different large districts is to begin to "document the national landscape of secondary school career development opportunities." IES expects that the Network Lead will help the teams disseminate a joint report based on their exploratory findings to fill a gap in our knowledge of career development opportunities. As the RFA states:

“To date, there is no systematic documentation or research about how districts are supporting the career development of secondary school learners. Furthermore, due to resource inequities across school districts, it is likely that such opportunities are unevenly distributed. Information is needed to better understand the accessibility and impact of career development approaches and tools used in the secondary (middle and high) school grades.”

Therefore, the findings from the 5 teams’ exploratory studies are important on their own, not just to narrow down which career development opportunity to conduct the impact study on.

***Q: Can I use the funds to support implementation of a career development opportunity in a district?***

A: Technically, yes, as long as you are collecting data on implementation, cost, and outcomes (and you maintain objectivity as both the implementer and evaluator), but the intent of this grant competition is to study what is *already available* to learners in the district to begin to map the landscape across the country. From the RFA: “IES intends to fund up to five research teams to examine the availability, quality, and impact of career development opportunities that support secondary school learners on education outcomes.”