

Research Networks Focused on Critical Problems of
Education Policy and Practice
Topic: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

AMY SUSSMAN, PH.D.

National Center for Special Education Research

Transcript

(Slide 1)

Hello. I'm Shannon Nemer at the National Center for Special Education Research and IES. On behalf of Amy Sussman, the program officer for this competition, I will be discussing the Research Networks Focused on Critical Problems of Education Policy and Practice.

(Slide 2)

Here's an outline of what I will cover today. First, I will provide an overview of the network's competition and the specific topic, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support.

Next, I will discuss the roles and responsibilities of network members focused on research teams, the only role that is being competed in fiscal year 2019. This will be followed by specific requirements and recommendations for research teams. I will cover some additional requirements for the application such as appendices, and end with advice for preparing a responsive and competitive application.

(Slide 3)

We are going to start with an overview. First, the objectives of the network's competition. Focus resources and attention on special education issues that are a high priority for the nation. To create a structure and process for researchers to share ideas, build new knowledge and strengthen their research and dissemination capacity, and to advance the field's understanding of a problem or issue beyond what one research team can do on its own.

(Slide 4)

There's only one network topic for fiscal year 2019, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, or MTSS. This competition focuses on integrated MTSS which is a comprehensive framework that provides multiple levels of support through coordinated, research-based practices, strategies and structures to meet the academic as well as social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all learners.

There has been less research on integrating both academic and behavioral-tiered systems, yet there may be some benefits to an integrated system. For example, this may create a more seamless system in which they are aligned and do not counteract each other. In addition, they may better serve students with disabilities who struggle in both the academic and behavioral skills. MTSS generally involves multiple tiers, frequently, three tiers of increasingly intensive intervention.

MTSS should include universal screening, progress monitoring, and database decision-making. IES is seeking proposals that focus on MTSS and early elementary schools as authentic education settings. There are several reasons for focusing on elementary schools. The focus of one school level or similar grade will help promote commonality among the different research topics and will facilitate meaningful collaboration among research teams.

We hope that a more coherent set of findings will provide more clear implications for next steps and research, practice, and policy. Elementary schools are generally kindergarten through Grade

5. However, the grades can be extended if they meet the following conditions. Pre-school or pre-K students and settings may be included if they are part of a K-12 school system.

Kindergarten through Grade 8 schools may be included if students in all grades are under the same system and would be served under the same MTSS framework.

(Slide 5)

The research must address the needs of, and include outcomes for, students with or at risk for disabilities.

By its very nature MTSS serves all students. For example, tier one includes universal practices for all students. At higher tiers, the framework serves children at risk for disabilities and with disabilities. Your proposed research must include students with or at risk for disabilities, but may also include other typically developing students or all students served by the system.

Although MTSS takes a systems approach, student outcomes must be measured. Preschool outcomes include developmental outcomes, including cognitive, communicative, linguistic, social, emotional, adaptive, functional, or physical development, and school readiness outcomes including pre-reading, language, vocabulary, early math or science knowledge, and social and behavioral competencies that prepare children for school.

In kindergarten through the end of elementary school, student outcomes include learning, achievement, and higher-order thinking in core academic content areas like reading, writing, mathematics, and science, as well as social skills and behaviors important to education and post-school success, and functional outcomes that improve education results.

(Slide 6)

This is just a visual overview of the structure of the network this competition intends to fund. There will be multiple research teams working on their research, but the teams will share information and collaborate as much as possible. For example, sharing research plans, measures, and so on.

The network lead is a team that holds the network together by coordinating network-wide activities. Note that although the graphic shows four research teams circling around the network lead, up to five research teams could be funded this year. The next few slides will explain further.

(Slide 7)

Please note that there will be no competition for network leads this year.

The fiscal year 2019 RFA only calls for applications for research teams. At least one research team must be funded through this competition in order to form a network. And a maximum of five research teams will be awarded through this year's competition.

(Slide 8)

The primary goal of this network's competition is to create a structure and process for research collaborations on integrated elementary school MTSS to advance the field beyond what one research team could do on its own.

Therefore, a primary expectation of the network is to share information and materials. This includes research plans, data collection tools, if relevant, and other ideas, as well as collaborate on dissemination activities. Please note that one change in the RFA this year is the expectation that all research teams will adopt common measures, at least one in each domain, the academic domain and behavioral domain, as it applies to your project.

Therefore, you should anticipate either adding measures after the network is formed or having one or more of your measures adopted by other teams.

(Slide 9)

The teams are also expected to provide one another with constructive feedback on their ideas and research plans. They're also expected to look for opportunities to strengthen their collective work, which includes opportunities to provide leadership to the field and to provide cross-site training or mentoring of early career researchers who are working on the research projects.

Finally, teams must collaborate on dissemination activities, including a synthesis of the network's findings, joint publications and policy briefings. Note that a lot of the collaborative dissemination and other collective work will be coordinated through the team lead. For example, they will take the lead on the synthesis, coordinate the full network meetings, develop a website, organize meetings with policymakers, and so forth.

(Slide 10)

We are now going to focus on the application requirements for research teams.

(Slide 11)

Research teams must address, at a minimum, research on key components of MTSS, outcomes of students with or at risk for disabilities.

IES is open to a range of different types of disabilities or severity of disabilities. Applicants are encouraged to address other challenges or issues beyond the minimum. The RFA lists additional issues in need of further research. But while these issues are encouraged, they will not receive preferential treatment.

In other words, there are no extra points or increases on scores if you focus on one of those listed areas of research.

(Slide 12)

There are four primary sections of the RFA narrative, significance, research plan, personnel, and resources. Note that the recommended length of the narrative for a research team proposal is no more than 30 pages.

In the RFA, each of these sections has a list of requirements. Note that if you don't address these requirements, your RFA will not be considered. Each section also has a list of recommendations to make your application more competitive.

(Slide 13)

The significance section is where you will discuss what issues your research will address and why these are important.

You are required to indicate the specific research objectives and the student population or populations. For a competitive proposal, IES recommends that you discuss the state of integrated MTSS research and indicate what is known and not known about how to implement MTSS in elementary schools.

Discuss the major research questions and how they will address the objectives of the MTSS network and provide a theory of change or logic model relevant to your research goals.

(Slide 14)

Recommendations are continued here. It's also recommended that you discuss the practical importance of the work.

How will it lead to improvements in education outcomes for students with or at risk for disabilities? Describe the setting where you will conduct your research. Explain the overall vision for your research, as well as the empirical and theoretical support. Discuss the future scalability of any intervention work. This recommendation is new in the RFA this year.

You should consider factors such as the potential market for the intervention, resources and organizational structure necessary for widespread adoption and implementation, and commercialization potential. Describe your plans to disseminate the research to a wide range of audiences, although IES has required a dissemination plan in past years, this year, the peer reviewers will consider the dissemination plan submitted in Appendix A as part of the significance within the research narrative.

(Slide 15)

The research plan section is where you will describe the methodology used to answer your research questions. You are required to describe your planned research methods, planned data analyses, and a cost analysis and, if applicable, a cost effectiveness analysis. Note that this last part is new in this year's RFA.

If you are developing an intervention, IES now requires a cost analysis to allow schools, districts, and states to compare different interventions and identify which are most likely to lead to

greatest gains in student outcomes for the lowest costs. A cost effectiveness analysis is also required for development work whenever possible.

If you cannot conduct a cost effectiveness analysis for development work, you must provide a rationale for not being able to conduct one. If you are conducting efficacy or effectiveness research, you are required to conduct both a cost analysis for the intervention and a cost effectiveness analysis for the primary student outcomes.

For a competitive proposal, IES recommends that you discuss your sample and setting. For example, the sample size and populations, barriers to recruitment and retention, and how you plan to overcome those barriers, the authentic education setting and why it's relevant to your research questions.

You should also discuss the measures you plan to use including the key variables, whether you will be developing measures or using pre-existing ones. If pre-existing ones, you'll want to include their psychometric properties. Keep in mind that you will now be expected to adopt common measures with the rest of the network, whenever possible.

(Slide 16)

To continue recommendations for the research plan, you should include your specific approach to methodology and data analysis used to answer the research questions.

If you are using extent data for any part of the study, you will want to discuss which measures or variables from the data you plan to use. Explain how your effect sizes will be reported in ways that policymakers and practitioners can understand. If you are developing assessments, describe the iterative process of developing and testing them. For the cost analysis, you should identify all potential expenditures.

For example, overall cost, cost per component, and so on. For the cost effectiveness analysis, you'll need to consider the cost of the intervention together with the impact of the intervention on primary student outcomes. The RFA provides additional suggestions of what to include for each of these analyses.

Finally, you should include a timeline to indicate your plans for each step in the project, such as sample recruitment, data collection, and so on. Note that you can place the timeline in the narrative or in Appendix C, but you cannot discuss it narratively in the appendix. There are more recommendations for this section in the RFA than we could include in these slides, so I encourage you to read that part of the RFA carefully.

(Slide 17)

For the personnel section, you are required to discuss the qualifications of the members of the research team. For a competitive proposal, IES recommends that you discuss the key personnel at your primary institution, and any subaward institution and consultants.

Discuss the qualifications, roles, and responsibilities and percentage of time for the project. All key personnel should have sufficient participation percentages of committed time to carry out the

proposed work and past success at dissemination. Please note that this year's RFA places extra emphasis on discussing the skills each member of the team has demonstrated in collaborating with research partners.

Describe the experience and expertise among team personnel in building partnerships with schools and communities who serve students with or at risk for disabilities and their history of translating research into practice for these schools and communities.

(Slide 18)

To continue the recommendations for personnel: demonstrate that across the research team, there's expertise in both behavioral and academic interventions, or tiered systems. Identify a point of contact for the research synthesis and discuss their qualifications and time commitment. Identify and describe the qualifications for the key personnel who will be responsible for conducting the cost analysis and cost effectiveness analysis.

Discuss your team members' past experiences working in a research network including lessons learned and ways to build consensus. Discuss the roles of key state or local officials, if relevant. If they are participating, make sure to include letters of agreement in Appendix E. We will discuss the appendices in more detail later. You should identify the management structure and procedures that will be used to keep your project on track and ensure the quality of its work.

This is especially important for projects involving multiple institutions carrying out different tasks that must be coordinated and/or integrated.

(Slide 19)

For the resource section, you are required to discuss the resources you have to conduct the project. For a competitive application, IES recommends you discuss the institution's capacity and experience to manage a grant this size.

Discuss access to available resources at your institution, and any subaward institutions. Describe plans to acquire resources that are not currently available or accessible. Discuss access to the schools and districts that will be the focus of the research. You should include letters of agreement in Appendix E, include information about the student, and teacher and school incentives, if applicable.

Describe access to data sets required for your research. You should include letters of agreement and Appendix E. Finally, you should describe your capacity to disseminate information about your research, including the findings. Include this in a Dissemination Plan in Appendix A. This should include sufficient time for key personnel to participate in dissemination activities including leadership events that will be organized by the network lead.

(Slide 20)

Here are the important dates and deadlines associated with this networks competition. Try to upload your application several days before the deadline, in this case, August 9th, at 4:30. The

zero seconds is a real deadline. This will allow you to avoid slowness of the server on deadline date, and allow time if a mistake is made to upload again.

Letters of intent are requested, but not required. Note that this deadline has already passed. If you intend to submit an application and did not submit a letter of intent, it would be a good idea to email the program officer with your idea now. The program officers review them and then send you feedback. And the Standards and Review Office uses them to get an estimate of how many applications will be submitted and the topic areas. That helps them in planning and choosing peer reviewers.

All the information is superseded by your application, so there's no problem if you have changed your idea a little bit or a lot during the time between submission of your letter and your full application.

(Slide 21)

There are six appendices plus the budget and budget narrative that must be included.

We'll go through each of the appendices now.

(Slide 22)

Appendix A is required. Your plan should include how you will contribute to the network's overall dissemination efforts, as well as your own team's dissemination efforts. You should identify the expected audiences and ways to reach them, include the expectation that you will publish in both peer review, scientific journals, as well as venues for policymakers and practitioners.

If products result from the project, they must be made available for research purposes or general use. Overall, your plan should reflect the actual goals of your research. For example, if you are developing a model or evaluating a model.

(Slide 23)

Appendix B is required if you are re-submitting an application that you have revised from a previous submission.

This is where you will respond to prior reviewer comments explaining what you have changed in response to the comments, or why you have chosen not to make changes. If you submitted a somewhat similar application in the past, but are submitting the current application as a new application, you should use Appendix B to provide a rationale explaining why the current application should be considered new, rather than a resubmitted application.

(Slide 24)

Appendix C is optional. It includes figures, charts, and tables. For example, it may include your timeline or a diagram of your management structure. It would also include measures used to

collect data for your project. For example, individual test items, surveys, or observation, or interview protocols.

(Slide 25)

Appendix D also optional. This is where you would include examples of materials used in the program or policy. For example, this may include curriculum material, computer screenshots, training documents, assessment items, or any other types of materials used in the intervention or assessment being studied.

Please note the difference between assessments you should include an Appendix C and Appendix D. Appendix C contains the measures you are using in your research to collect data. Appendix D contains the measures or materials that you are going to study. For example, to develop or validate.

(Slide 26)

Although it's optional, Appendix E, Letters of Agreement is strongly encouraged, particularly since MTSS research must be conducted within schools at the system's level.

Reviewers will know if there is not a ready support from your sources of data. You should include letters of agreement from all your research partners. These can include schools or districts where research will be conducted, other data sources, for example, agencies holding administrative data, or consultants for your project. Letters should clearly state the organization's expected role in the partnership and their commitments to the project, the nature and extent of their commitment.

Note that the letter should be written by individuals who have the authority to commit the organization's participation in your study. Letters from holders of data should make clear that the data described in the application will be provided for the purpose used by the project. Letters should be readable. Do not reduce the size or include poor photocopies.

(Slide 27)

Applications for the research team must include a data management plan if you are evaluating a developed intervention or model either an efficacy study or an effectiveness study. This appendix must describe your plans for making the final research data from the proposed projects available to others.

It should include information like the type of data to be shared, plans for managing the data, file format of data, and expected documentation, how others will be able to access the data and related information.

(Slide 28)

Data management plans are expected to differ depending on the nature of the project and the data collected. Note that the cost of the data management plan can be covered by the grant and should be included in the budget and explained in the budget narrative.

The peer review process will not include the plan and the scoring of the scientific merit of the application, but if your proposal is being considered for funding and your plan is determined and complete, you will have to complete your plan before an award will be made.

(Slide 29)

As you prepare your budget forms and budget narratives, please take note of the maximum grant awards and project durations.

For research teams, the maximum award is \$4 million and the maximum duration is five years. You will complete a budget form which will be accompanied by a budget narrative to explain the budget.

(Slide 30)

Finally, let's discuss the basic steps to preparing a responsive, high-quality application.

Your initial goal is to make sure the proposal gets into the hands of reviewers. That means download and complete the correct application package from grants.gov. Pay close attention to the specific requirements and the request for applications. Do not exceed maximum award amounts or durations. Comply with allowable content and required content, and submit your applications no later than 4:30 p.m., Washington DC time on, or preferably, before the deadline, August 9th, 2018.

(Slide 31)

Once IES receives your application, the IES Standards and Review Office takes it from there. This office is responsible for compliance screening for content requirements like the appendices, responsiveness screening for program requirements. These are requirements we went over earlier.

Remember, requirements are the minimal required for an application. This is what was used in responsiveness screening. Recommendations are used by peer reviewers to check the quality of the application. So, after the application is deemed responsive to the RFA, the IES Standards and Review Office assigns the application to reviewers with substantive and methodological expertise on your topic.

These primary reviewers will assign preliminary scores.

(Slide 32)

The most competitive applications go to full panel. Keep in mind as you prepare your application, that many panelists will be generalists to your topic. What do we mean by that? In addition to reviewers who are experts on your specific topic, it is very likely that the review panels will represent a mix of disciplines and methodological expertise.

Keep in mind this audience as you prepare your application. At the panel meeting, the panelists will discuss each application and each panelist will record the final scores. Funding decisions are based on panel scores and available resources or IES funds.

(Slide 33)

Note that the criteria in which proposal will be evaluated corresponds to the requirements for proposals described earlier.

This includes the same four criteria, significance, research plan, personnel, and resources.

(Slide 34)

Pay close attention to the recommendations for a strong application. These recommendations are based on IES experience, and reviewers use the recommendations to differentiate high and low-quality applications.

(Slide 35)

As the webinar comes to an end, I will leave you with a few extra tips to improve your application. First, put yourself in the reviewer's shoes. Good, clear writing makes a difference. It will help get your ideas across accurately, and the reviewers appreciate an application that is easy to read. Use diagrams and figures to help explain complex ideas such as conceptual frameworks.

However, do not use diagrams with microscopic print.

(Slide 36)

Next, make information easy for the reviewers to find. For example, follow the same headings and sub-headings that are used in the RFA, and use different types of formatting. For example, bullets or boldface to underscore your key points.

Finally, seek input from other people before you submit your proposal. You can discuss the project with the IES program officer. At minimum, you should definitely make sure that your project idea fits the RFA before you embark on writing a full-blown proposal. This is often accomplished through the letter of intent and the program officer's response to it, but you can continue to ask the program officer questions as you write a proposal.

You should ask colleagues those who did not work with you on the proposal, to review the proposal. Finally, find someone to proofread the proposal before it is submitted. Typos and other errors are distracting to reviewers and counteracts the first point about good, clear writing.

(Slide 37)

Finally, here are some references for you. The Request for Applications is on the IES funding website.

You need to read this. You can search abstracts of funded projects to get an idea of the types of projects we fund. However, keep in mind that this particular competition is fairly new. You may want to look at the NCER network projects, though they differ in content and some specific features. You must access the application package using grants.gov.

Finally, you can find the program officer's email address here if you need to contact her. That's all we have for this webinar. Thank you for listening.