

NCSER Webinar
Research Networks Focused On Critical Problems of Education Policy and Practice
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ONLY

Tom Brock:

So what exactly do we mean when we talk about a research network?

I'm going to advance to a diagram which I think perhaps best conveys what we have in mind. Each research network will consist of four or five research teams that are conducting a particular research project of the teams' own devising. Each team -- each research team will have their own grant to carry out this particular project, but we are seeing some commonality among all of the projects in terms of the types of questions they are going after and in terms of the types of methodology they use to address their particular questions. The research teams will be performing their work independently from each other, but we are asking the research teams to come together on a regular basis to share ideas, to talk about their progress as they begin developing findings to think together about how to disseminate and apply the lessons from their work. And we've identified a network lead to be responsible for coordinating this activity to bring the research teams together and help ensure that their activities are indeed complementary.

Our thinking behind the research networks is that they are really a loose confederation, so again each research team will have its own project, its own grant. But we are explicitly hoping that with this approach teams will be able to challenge each other, be able to comment on each other's work, be able to bring different perspectives, different ideas that will strengthen the bigger body of work. We are also hoping that with this network approach we will be able to support similar kinds of projects in the different parts of the country and with different populations. Our expectations of network members, as I said are that they will come together to share their research plans, to share their data collection tools, to share information and ideas on a regular basis. We are also hoping that network members will provide constructive feedback to one another that will strengthen their work, and that network members will work together and look for opportunities perhaps to develop some common measures to conduct a research synthesis toward the end of their grants periods and to engage in dissemination.

So let me turn it over now, to my colleague, James Benson, who will talk about the college completion network.

James Benson:

We chose to focus on students in open access institutions, mostly community colleges, and broad access institutions, mostly four-year state colleges, because these institutions serve a large proportion of college students and a majority of first-time degree seeking students. And also completion rates at these institutions tend to be low.

Wai Chow:

So I'm going to talk a little bit about the process and the application requirements and recommendations around applications to this network.

So this institute seeks support for a network of interdisciplinary research teams to undercover the early elementary science teaching actions associated with improved outcomes for students from low income families and underrepresented groups.

So what do we mean by teaching action?

On Page 12 of the RFA, we define teaching action as something a teacher does during lessons that are servable and specific. The RFA provides some examples of what teaching actions could be, like of kind of frequency and duration of talk you say teachers. Also on Page 12 of the RFA, we define the term underrepresented groups as groups that are not involved in science courses or employed at science professions at the level expected given their numbers in the population. For example, as an American and Hispanic Latino students are considered underrepresented in science because they constitute smaller percentages of science degree recipients and employed scientists and engineers than they do other population. So those are our two main definitions.

James Benson:

We have the question pertaining to the college completion network league. That question is, “How can we know what research will complement the other research studies without knowing what the other studies are?” Also, “Are we expected to propose concrete research questions?” And finally, “Are we expected to propose approaches to determining the research questions?”

Tom Brocks:

So, this is a good question, and for those of you interested in the college completion network, you actually do have a bit of a leg up on that. IES funded two research teams as part of this network last year. You can go on our website and read the abstracts that provide more detail about the work of those two teams.

With this new competition we are expected to fund up to three additional research teams to be part of the college completion network. That said, I do recognize that there is some uncertainty around exactly what each research team will be doing. My advice, my personal advice, would be to focus in on the larger goals of this particular research network, to focus on issues around college completion, to focus on institutions that are open and broad access and to be thinking kinds of research, in particular various kinds of background or really supplementary research, that might support other researchers working in this area. One possible idea that I think was proposed by the questioner, is that you might throw out some ideas in your application that you think might be leading candidates, but then also describe a process for refining those ideas or selecting from among them once the other research teams are identified.

So for the science teaching, the larger point is of course still true. In this case, we do not have any research teams yet identified; however, my advice would be to go to the RFA to look at the broader goals for this particular network and to try to identify types of activities, smaller research studies if you will, background studies that will help inform any group of researchers working in the particular field. I might turn it over to Wai to see if she wants to amplify on that.

Wai Chow:

No Tom, I think I agree with what you are saying and that the RFA has some suggestions about what those particular research activities might be. And so, I think that's a good resource that kind of gets our brain cells moving on what we propose to do that in general would be helpful for a network like this.

Tom Brock:

I should say that we are little reluctant to be too concrete here just because we don't want to tip the hat to any particular applicant or to, you know, plant ideas really. But again, looking back through the RFA, I think there are enough clues there to see what the leadings interests are. And many of you who are working in this field may already have data sets or may contacts in the field with some additional data collection, some additional analysis you could really help provide additional insight into what some of the key challenges are on or about teaching students in early elementary school grades about science or about improving the prospects of low income and underrepresented students in this field.

James Benson:

Tom, we have an additional question for the network lead role, that is, "Is there any specific guidance around website specifications?"

Tom Brock:

We do not have any specific guidance other than there must be a website. We encourage creative and fresh ideas here. I will note in the Institute's Research and Development Centers we have made this a requirement over the years and one thing you might do is to investigate the research and development centers we have funded, look at their websites for ideas and also to get a sense of at least what would be some of our minimal expectations. We are also interested, as I said, in new ideas and ways to improve upon what has been in the past.

So, actually one other question, I see just came in. There was a question regarding the Science Teaching Network with the emphasis on underrepresented students and whether or not students with disabilities or at risk for disabilities might be considered as part of that group. And also, if there is any information, are there resources available for how to understand how to define students with disabilities or at risk for disabilities. Wai would you like to take that?

Wai Chow:

Oh, yeah sure. In this RFA, we are open to students at risk for disabilities and in terms of definition for that the RFA I don't believe includes that information, so that information is available on the RFA website. You can email me directly as well.

Tom Brock:

The National Special Education Research does provide a definition in their special education research grants program 324A. So that would be a resource you could go to for a definition.

I saw earlier among the questions that people had questions about, whether or not the network lead was responsible for coordinating and covering the budget for the network meeting that will occur annually, in the first year twice during that year. And yes, it is expected that the network

lead would actually coordinate that. Either they will handle logistics in-house or they will handle those logistics through perhaps as sub-award or consultant, and that should be covered under their budget.