Overview of Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships

Allen Ruby:
Good afternoon. I'm Allen Ruby from the Institute of Education Sciences and today's webinar is on the researcher-practitioner partnerships in education research grant topic. As I go through the webinar, if you do have a question, please use your chat function and send it in. Your phone should be muted, so there won't be any chance to ask oral questions. But the chat function will allow you to send questions.

The Researcher-Practitioner Partnership in Education Research (RPP) is a topic within the Partnerships and Collaborations grant program, known as 84.305H. For this year, this is the only topic being completed under that grant program.

I'm joined by Jackie Buckley from the National Center for Special Education Research, and she'll be able to answer questions specifically about conducting these types of grants focused on populations with disabilities or at risk of having a disability.

Here's an overview of what we'll cover today. We'll take a look at IES and its mission, the general requirements for this grant topic, and then we'll go into the specifics, the purpose of this grant topic, the project narrative and its five components, some other important sections of your application, and preparing and submitting an application.

IES has three legislative duties: describing the conditions and progress of education, identifying practices that improve academic achievement and access, and evaluating education programs. And this grant program can address all three of these duties.

The structure of IES is that we have a director appointed by the president, confirmed by the Senate. The director is advised by a National Board for Education Sciences. And under the director, there are four centers: the National Center for Education Evaluation, which does contracted evaluations and runs the regional labs, the What Works Clearinghouse and ERIC; the National Center for Education Statistics which carries out nationally representative surveys. NCES is currently also running a grant program for state education agencies looking to improve their state longitudinal data systems.

There are the two research grant-making centers, the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research. These centers are where the program officers like ourselves are housed, and program officers can work closely with you on developing your application. And we will also work with you if you receive a grant.

Also under the Director is the Standards and Review Office, which is responsible for the peer review process. That the peer review process is separate from the grant assistance provided by the program officers makes it possible for the program officers to work with applicants, e.g., to discuss with you your research, to identify the best program to apply, and to think about how to structure your application to address some of the past comments of peer reviewer panels.

IES' grant programs are to answer four questions. First, what works to improve student educational outcomes, so that we can disseminate these practices, programs, and policies. Second, what doesn't work, so we can stop disseminating them. Third, to identify what works, for whom, and where, so we can use these type of educational interventions in their appropriate places with the appropriate students and teachers and schools. And fourth, to understand why they work, so we can understand how to improve education and can build on this understanding in future work.

Partnerships have become of growing importance at IES. They are seen as being able to help with two things.: to help focus research on issues that are of high concern to policymakers and practitioners, and to help researchers communicate their findings in useful ways. Through partnerships, policymakers and practitioners are to have a large role in setting the research agenda. And there is to be constant communication between researchers and the practitioners on what is being found and what types of further research should be done to follow up.

Under the RPP topic, projects are to both develop a partnership through the joint initial research, as well as to develop a longer-term research plan. The hope is that the project will foster a longer-term research partnership that will continue on after the grant.

The expectation is that the proposed work will be collaborative from the start to the finish, that partners will jointly develop the research questions, agree on the research design and its implementation, discuss results as they come in and the ongoing direction of research, consider the practice and policy implications of the finding, disseminate the results, and plan future research.

There are three general requirements for this grant topic: 1), you must focus on student education outcomes., 2) you must apply as a partnership between a research institution and a state or local education agency, and 3) you must propose to do initial research on an education issue of high priority to the state or local education agency.

Let's start with the first one of the requirements, which is a focus on student education outcomes. Because IES focuses on research that improves the quality of education for all students, projects funded by IES grants are required to examine and measure the education outcomes of students. These student outcomes can be grouped as academic outcomes and social and behavioral outcomes that support students' success in school.

Under the academic outcomes, there are two categories. There are measures of academic achievement, such as test scores (be they standardized tests, researcher tests, developed tests, end-of-course tests, graduation test) and grades. Second, there are measures of academic progress such as course and grade completion, high school graduation and dropout, post-secondary access, progress, and completion.

There are also social and behavioral outcomes that support learning. These may include social skills such as responsibility and cooperation, learning strategies such as goal setting and self-regulated learning, attitudes such as motivation and academic self-concept, and behaviors such as attendance and disciplinary action. When examining social and behavioral competencies, it makes for a stronger application if you also look at some of the academic outcomes that these are supposed to support.

The student population that you can examine goes from pre-kindergarten through post-secondary and adult education. You can address any grade range or grouping within this area. For example, you could focus solely on fifth grade. You could look across all of middle school. You might look at the transition between PreK and kindergarten or high school and college, as long as you're somewhere within this pre-kindergarten to adult education continuum.

You can examine outcomes for students without disabilities or students with disabilities or at risk of disabilities, or both. If you are interested in students at risk of disabilities, please look at this website because IES has specific requirements for how it defines "at risk."

Another way to think about the outcomes is to consider them by by grade range. In the pre-kindergarten group, your research must address center-based pre-kindergarten programs and the outcomes are primarily those that would be considered school readiness, such as pre-reading, pre-language, vocabulary, early math, and science, along with the social and behavioral competencies to take part in school.

For kindergarten to grade 12, there are the achievement outcomes in the major academic subjects of reading, writing, math, and science as measured by tests and grades, as well as the measures of academic progress through the education system. And there are i the social skills, attitudes, and behaviors that support this type of learning and progress.

Under post-secondary, which includes baccalaureate and sub-baccalaureate, the outcomes include access to, persistence in, progression through, and completion of the education program, with completion often including a degree, certificate, or credential. You can look at any one of those four or combination of them. Additionally, for students in developmental education programs, you can also look at achievement outcomes in reading, writing, English language proficiency, and mathematics.

Adult education students are defined as being 16 years or above and outside the K-to-12 system. And they'll be taking part in such programs as adult basic education, adult secondary education, adult English as a second language, and high school equivalency test preparation, such as the GED. You can look at their achievement or their academic progress through their education program.

The second general requirement is that applications must be from a partnership. And the minimum for a partnership would be one research institute and one education agency, be it a state or local agency. IES does not endorse a specific model of research partnerships, but we do view research partnerships as going beyond two common forms of collaboration between research institutions and education agencies. The first is where a researcher is hired by an education agency to perform a specific service and report the results. And the second is where the researcher has an initial research idea and obtains permission from the agency to carry that research out within the agency's schools. Instead of these two approaches, we're looking for a partnership where there's joint development of the research questions and joint involvement in the research as it is done.

Each partner must contribute a PI. For the state or local agency that PI must have decision-making authority over the education issue being examined. That doesn't mean they have to be a superintendent. But they do have to have some oversight over the education issue.

IES asks for a joint letter of agreement from the two partners that describes the responsibilities of the partnership. So, it's more like a memorandum of understanding, showing that both sides are agreeing to the work being proposed. Other members can join the partnership, and they should provide separate letters of agreement as well.

Your partnership may be brand-new, or it may be already in existence. If you're proposing an existing partnership, you want to do two things.: 1) show the grant will be used to carry out new work (not continuing in the same work) and 2) an existing partnership is much stronger if not only all the institutions have the partnership, but you can show that some of the same people are going to work together. For example, universities that have worked for a long period of time with a school district but the proposed partnership has new people on both sides working together. That's probably less of an existing partnership. There may be structures in place, but the people still are going to have to learn to work together.

The definition of a research institution is quite broad. To be eligible to be a research partner, you just have to show that you have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research. This can be any kind of organization, a nonprofit or a for-profit organization; it can be public or private institutions and agencies, such as colleges, universities, and research firms.

The education agency partner must be a state education agency or local education agency. There are many types of state education agencies, e.g., departments, boards, commissions. The point is that they're overseeing the area of education the partnership is working in. So, they may be focused on early learning. They may look at K to 12. They may focus on post-secondary or adult ed. Or they may cover all of these together; it depends on the state.

This is a broader definition than you'll find in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which just focuses on primary agency responsible for supervision of elementary and secondary schools. So, all you have to show is that the state agency is overseeing the area of education that you're going to be looking at. State education agencies also include D.C., Puerto Rico, and the outlying areas, such as the American Virgin Islands.

The local education agencies are primarily public school districts. Some states have others types of organizations as well, such as community college districts and tribal education agencies. What is no included under local education agencies are nonpublic organizations that oversee or administer schools, such as education management organizations or charter management organizations. These groups can be partners in your research, and can be the focus of the research. But you must have the public state or district agency that oversees the schools that are involved with those nonpublic organizations as a key partner. So, you can work with charter schools in a state, but you have to have the state agency that oversees charter schools as well as the charter association as a partner.

In some cases, some very small local education agencies may have one school. They can be your partner, but the peer reviewers may not consider that work as significant as if there were multiple schools involved.

Another form of local education agency concerns state and city post-secondary systems (public post-secondary systems). In some states and cities, there is a higher education agency that oversees them and that agency would need to be included as the agency partner. However, in other cases, there is no agency overseeing them; they actually oversee themselves. And in that case, the post-secondary system can be the education agency partner.

One other issue in regards to a post-secondary system study is that the postsecondary system cannot study itself, i.e., it cannot serve as both the education agency and the research institution, even if we're talking about different centers or campuses within the system looking at another center. So, you can't have the institutional research office of a post-secondary system looking at another program. You would have to get an outside research institution to study the post-secondary education system in that case.

Additional partners are welcome as long as they're adding to the quality of the work. You may decide you want to work with more than one state or local education agency. This decision could be linked their similarities, either in type and/or concern with the education issue you're looking at. They may geographically contiguous and concerned with the same issue, or they may be far apart but they're grappling with the same issue. It can be helpful to include multiple districts f you're working with smaller districts in order to increase the significance of the work (as measured by the number of students that will be affected by your research).

You may want to include non-education state and local agencies because they're involved with a specific population that you're working with. For example, if you were studying foster children, you may want to work with the Department of Social Services as well as the Department of Education. We have an ongoing project in Connecticut looking at juveniles in the justice system and their education, that's a partnership between a university, the Department of Education, and the Department of Justice.

You may include one more research institution. Again, the purpose would be they have shared interest in the work being done, and they bring complementary research skills and capacity.

You may want to bring in non-research institutions, such as stakeholder groups or issue-oriented groups because of their interest in the work or because they may help with the work, e.g., contribute to the research questions, increase involvement in the study by their constituents, obtain data that you need.

The third general requirement is that you propose some initial research. Researcher-practitioner partnership projects are to carry out research on an education issue that has implications for student education outcomes and on an education issue is that is identified by the education agency as being high-priority. We use the term "initial," as in "initial research," because we don't expect that under this grant that you will fully answer the research questions. You're supposed to begin to address them and then lay out a future research agenda to fully answer them.

IES's theory of change is that by jointly carrying out research from the start of the project, from identifying the research questions to developing the future research plan, the project will both strengthen the partnership between the groups, as well as increase the education agency's capacity to take part in research and use research results in their decision making.

The initial research is to prepare the partnership to carry out the type of research IES supports under its two primary grant programs, the Education Research Grant Programs, 84.305A, and the Special Education Research Grant Programs, 84.324A. And these two grant programs support four types of work. The first type we call exploration, which is descriptive and correlational work to identify factors that may be associated with student education outcomes, that may be changed, and that are under control of the education system.

Once identified, these factors, then, may become the target for the next type of work we call development and innovation, which is to develop a new or revise an existing education intervention to improve student outcomes and to pilot test it. The third topic is the evaluation of interventions (we call this efficacy and replication) where you rigorously evaluate an education intervention's impact on student education outcomes. And the fourth category we call measurement, which is to develop a new or revise an existing measure and validate it or to validate an existing measure.

So, this initial research is to prepare you to do one of these four types of research. It's also to help with agency capacity building. This capacity building occur during the initial research. But if the education agency is interested, the project can also include specific activities that the partners agree will build the agency's capacity to take part in and use research. We are not expecting education agencies to become research organizations and able to do this type of work on their own, just to become more capable of taking part in it and using the results.

You'll be proposing both partnership work and research work. IES is a science agency, and the research is at least of equal importance or more than the partnership development. This research should be of value to both the education agency and to building knowledge in the education sciences. The balance can vary a bit by the partnership. Some partnerships may be new and may need more attention to the partnership building. More existing ones that are already functioning may want to focus more on the research. We'll return to describing the initial research when we get to the project narrative.

Check the fit of the research you're thinking of doing and the RPP grant topic. It's not appropriate if you're not looking at student outcomes. It's also not appropriate if you are ready to start one of the four types of research I mentioned earlier: exploration, development, efficacy, or measurement. If you're ready to do any of these types of research, you should apply under the Education Research Grants program or the Special Education Research Grants program. Third, if you're working with an education agency, and they're interested in the work you're doing, but they don't want to be a partner -- they don't want to commit the time to that kind of work, or it's just not their top priority, but they're still willing to allow you to do the research -- again, you may consider coming in under Education Research Grants or Special Education Research Grants programs.

To reiterate what this grant topic is for, as we end the discussion on the general requirements - IES intends to support partnerships of research institutions and state or local education agencies, as they identify an education issue or problem of high priority for the education agency that has implications for improving student outcomes, and carry out initial research on this issue, develop a plan for future research on the education issue, and, increase the education agency's capacity for taking part in research and using research results.

Here are the expected products of the grant program: a description of the partnership, description of the education issue being addressed, the findings from the initial research, a plan for the partnership to carry out future research, a description of the capacity-building activities that were carried out, recommendations for how the partnership could be maintained over the longer term, and some lessons learned from developing and forming the partnerships that could then be useful for other partnerships that are trying to start up and build themselves in the same way.

Applicants ask, "Am I supposed to publish from this type of grant since its mainly initial research and partnership building"? IES argues that you should because your findings will be important for others to know and conclusions on the development and improvement of partnerships will be useful for others who want to form partnerships.

I have a question that asks, "We want to gather information on an issue in the first year and then shape an intervention to be tested in the second year." I would say that's not the purpose of the RPP, to actually create and test an intervention in your second year. Fully developing and piloting an intervention is supposed to be done under the development and innovation goal under the 305A and 324A grant programs. What you could propose under an RPP would be gathering the information on the issue and doing some preliminary work on development. But the full development and testing should really come under the primary grant programs. IES' development goal is a four-year grant because, from experience, we've found people need multiple years to do strong iterative development, and then at least one year to do a pilot-test.

Next to discuss is the project narrative. This is where you propose your work and describe your capacity to carry it out. You have a maximum of 25 pages. This is what the peer reviewers focus on. It contains these five sections. Each section will receive a score from the peer reviewers, and then your application will get an overall score. In the Request for Applications there is a set of requirements under each of these sections. And these requirements are the minimal your application needs to provide to be considered responsive and therefore to be forwarded for peer review. There is also a set of recommendations. The recommendations are what we ask the peer reviewers to use when they rate the quality of your application.

The first section is Significance. And here, you're going to describe why this proposed research is important to get done - how do you justify the importance of your research? The first thing you have to do is clearly set out the education issue or problem that is going to be the focus of your work. Here you may also want to describe the education system you'll be working in a bit, to show how this education issue fits into it. You want to describe how this issue is linked to student education outcomes, the type we talked about earlier.

You can propose a theory of change here, which really shows how the issue works through the system and is linked to student outcomes. So, it may work through principals, through teachers or the whole school before it links to students' academic and/or behavioral outcomes.

You want to show evidence that this is a priority of the agency. The peer reviewers often comment on an application that the research proposed seems to be of interest mainly to the researcher. Under RPP this is a criticism (it may not be under other IES grant programs). Here, they're arguing that the researcher did not consult the agency on its priorities but instead promoted their own researcher agenda.

You'll also want to discuss how what's learned from the research will be useful to the agency's practice. Again, another common reviewer comment is that the issue is important, but the research is not producing results that would be helpful to the state or local agency. This is another form of criticism that the program is overly focused on the research community's interests.

You'll save most of your discussion of the actual research plan for the Research Plan section. But here you want give a general description of it so that people will understand what the education issue is and why the research will produce results will be of use to the education agency.

You'll also want to describe any ongoing work the agency is doing on this issue – this both makes clear the priority of the issue for the agency and lets you describe how you'll be building on or complementing the ongoing work. And then, although of secondary importance -- you may note that this is an issue of importance to other agencies and to the field of education research in general.

Someone has noted that in our primary grant program, 84.305A Education Research Grants -- under our Post-secondary and Adult Education topic, we are this year allowing access to a sample of post-secondary students known as the NPSAS:16. Access to this sample is not allowed in the RPP grant topic because there really isn't enough time to work with that data. If you want to do exploratory work using the NPSAS data, you should come in under the Education Research Grants program or Special Education Research Grants program.

Let me just give an example of a of a research question. Last year, we gave three grants that addressed a similar issue. The applications came from three different districts saying, "In our district, kindergarten doesn't know how well prepared the students are coming in from Pre-K because there's really no good connection between preschool and kindergarten because preschool is spread across multiple sectors, some of them outside the district's control."

So, all three projects have identified this issue as helping the district learn about school readiness for their incoming kindergarten children by learning more and linking more to the preschool sector and obtaining data on preschool students. That issue was seen as a very clear one by the peer reviewers and led to a clear need for a partnership between the LEA and preschool providers and initial research looking at the PreK and kindergarten data, and have future research implications.

Somebody has asked, “I’ve planned to work directly with a specific office that is part of the larger LEA. Is that okay, assuming I secure an MOU from the LEA?” The answer is yes. For example, in this case that I just mentioned, they might be working with the early learning or kindergarten part of the district office. As long as the district overall is supportive of the partnership, that would be fine.

Let’s go on to the partnership section. Here you want to describe who is in the partnership, and why are they in the partnership. You can describe the individual partners, -the research institution, the education agency, other members of the partnership - their common interests, how they complement one another in the proposed work, how everybody will contribute to the work, and how everyone will benefit from the partnership.

Don’t assume that reviewers will know your partners by name. You may want to give some details on the research institution, on the education agency, the past work they’ve done on this education issue, and any past work that the research institution has done working with state and local education agencies.

You’ll want to talk a bit about the stage of the partnership. If it’s an early partnership, reviewers may be looking for more contact between the partners on an ongoing basis if the personnel haven’t worked that closely before. If it’s a mature partnership, reviewers may have more confidence that the work will be done. But on the other hand, they may question the need for a grant: “If you have a mature partnership, why do you need more money to do this?” Often mature partnerships ask for funding to do something new that they haven’t done before within the partnership.

Conversely, if it’s an early partnership, there may be less confidence because we don’t know if the partners can work well together. But there’s usually a greater need for this type of grant because there isn’t a partnership in place to address this issue. This is especially true for districts that don’t have links to other research institutions.

It’s important, especially for new partnerships, to discuss how they came to this agreement to work on this issue. This is true for all, but early partnerships probably have had less time in these discussions and coming to agreement on what the research question is.

As I mentioned, regarding the research questions, it’s a huge concern to reviewers that these were jointly developed and that they address the education agency’s needs. So, it’s very important to make it clear how the education agency sees these research questions as helping to fulfill its mission.

Someone asked, "We are interested in collaborating with the state's technical assistance center, but I'm not sure if they have decision-making authority." I would need more information on the issue you're looking at. For example, if they provide technical assistance, let's just say to English-learner teachers, but there is someone else in the state education agency who oversees English learners, you would want that person as a partner on your project, as well as the technical assistance center. So, there should be someone from the agency who does more than provide assistance, who actually oversees the policy or the program that's related to the issue you're looking at.

Going back to partnerships, you should note if the education agency has other research partnerships and then show that they don't overlap with the work you're proposing to do. Setting out the management structure of the partnership is going to be very important, especially when there are multiple institutions or multiple offices within the education agency taking part because these offices have to coordinate.

Finally, data is really a major concern of the peer reviewers. Where is the data going to be kept? If not at the agency, then will the agency have access to it at the end of the project? Who will have access to the data? The project team only? Will outside researchers in the future have access to it? Will analysts from the agency have access to it? Several RPP projects have placed researchers in the education agency or to pay the agency's researchers to do some of this work and to develop the data system. This would be a further benefit to the agency, as well as a way of building the partnership.

Some partnerships are fairly complex. For example, one of the projects examining the connection between Pre-K and kindergarten includes a number of institutions. The University of Miami is the lead research institution and Miami-Dade County public schools is the lead education agency. There is also the Children's Trust, which is an independent special district that supports children and families which is providing data and data-sharing and analyses and dissemination. Also included are two preschool provider organizations: the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade and the Head Start provider in the district. And finally, they're including a state system that has a registry for preschool children with disabilities.

This project has multiple, very different organizations trying to work together here. And it is very complicated, and the management is very complicated. But they all have important roles, skills, and data on this issue. And if they can all successfully work together, they can make a large step forward in identifying what students need when they come out of preschool to be ready for kindergarten.

In addition, we ask for a partnership development plan. You really can't develop a partnership without knowing what the decision-making process is of the partnership. So, we're asking that be described here. How will the partnership determine the research direction, the capacity-building activities, the release of the research results, and how the research plans are developed? But second, how will the project increase the agency's ability to participate and use research? I mentioned earlier that we're hoping the joint research being done will help develop the agency's capacity to take part in and use research. Education agencies have different capacities in this regard and may have different purposes or goals for building their own capacity. And that can be reflected in the type of work done or the type of additional support provided to the agency.

Again, we're not expecting the agency to end up doing the research on its own, unless that -- that's a stated goal of the agency. But there may be some specific skills or specific products, such as datasets, that the agency wants to be able to draw on in the future. For example, under a current project the district asked that the research institution help them develop a system for responding to researcher data requests, to create an inventory of past and current requests, and an application process with sample agreements that the district could sign with researchers. So, they wanted to build their capacity to work with outside researchers on doing analysis of their data.

Another example is a state agency who was collecting data on schools that were under the state's school improvement process but this data was being collected by different offices inside the agency. And so, it asked, as part of the research, that the research institution help merge that data into one dataset so that the state analyst could look at all the information on schools in the improvement process.

Someone has asked, "How can a nonprofit determine the issues in the school system in that short a period of time?" First, let me pick on you for teaching purposes - that sentence is incorrect in that "You shouldn't be determining the issues." The agency should be involved in determining the issues and want your help in doing the initial research on the issue chosen. Secondly, the process does take time and effort before the grant. And so, you will have to work with a district or a state agency on understanding their needs and they need to understand what you can provide before applying. We expect for our regular grant programs to have a full research plan in place. And for this program, we expect that we have a partnership in place (at least the beginning of the partnership) and an initial research plan in place.

Someone has asked "if they are already working with a local education agency on delivery of services to special ed. students in the elementary schools, but now they want to look at dropout of special education high school students if that is too much overlap with our previous project?" And I would say no because you're moving to a new population of students and a new population of schools. So, you are actually extending your research, which is what this grant would be for, for existing partnerships. And so, I would encourage you to talk to Jackie Buckley a bit more about your idea to discuss what kind of research would fit under this grant program rather than the Special Education Research Grants program.

One other thing we're asking you to do in the partnership section is to monitor the success of your partnership, both during the partnership and then the possibilities for work after the grant ends. And we're asking that you consider how would you measure that the partnership is making adequate progress toward completing the goals of the project. And we're very open here to measures that you propose rather than offering them because the field is actually lacking in this area. And we are hoping that you will contribute to their development.

Someone asked “Could every partner charge staff time?” And the answer is yes. Anybody involved in this research can charge time to the grant if they’re doing the work proposed under the grant.

And someone else has asked whether the development and innovation goal will return to the Education Research Grants program. And the current intention is yes, that it should return next year. And I will note that it currently is remains in the Special Education Research Grants program.

Let me move on now to the Research Plan. There are actually two plans to discuss under the research plan. The first is the research plan for carrying out the initial research, and second your plan for preparing for the future research that is to occur after this project ends. As you write the research plan for your initial research, you will want to be clear how you’re meeting tthree objectives of the research: 1) answering the research question; 2) contributing to the understanding of the education issue; and 3) providing useful information for the education agency.

You want to make sure that your research questions and objectives mesh with what you proposed in the Significance section, where you proposed the education issue, the theory of change behind it, and justified that it is a priority of the education agency. In addition, the research plan should include these specifics: the sample, the setting, the measures you’ll be using, the research design, and your data analyses.

One way to think about framing your work is working forwards or working backwards. Working forwards is when you know there are gaps in your knowledge, and these gaps are preventing the state or local agency from making decisions based on evidence.

So, I mentioned the Connecticut study before. And in Connecticut, juveniles in the juvenile justice system may or tmay not receive education services. And the state wanted to find out, were they receiving education services? What were they? And what might be provided to them in the future in order to increase high school graduation rates and improve these students’ integration if and when they return to school? So, here, they were starting at a point where they didn’t know enough to say, “This is what we should do in the future. Instead, they need to gather the data on what is occurring now that will inform future decision making.

Another more concrete example is an ongoing project in which a district wanted to know more about the success of its English language learners. But it couldn’t track students who had graduated from the ELL program. And therefore, it couldn’t track, how successful was the program for its graduates. As part of this project, the research institution developed an indicator to identify these students in the district’s administrative data, which then led to some interesting analyses of outcomes for these students and comparing them with some of the non-ELLs and with ELLs who remained in the ELL program.

So, that’s working forwards, when you don’t know enough to make some good decisions or to know exactly what your research should be in the future.

The other way of framing your proposed initial research is working backwards - when we already know what the future research work is that has to be done, but we need to prepare to do it as we're not ready to do it now. Let me walk through some examples of working backwards from the type of research supported under IES' primary grant programs - the four types of research: exploration, development, evaluation, and measurement.

One example is a current project that knows it wants to develop an intervention to increase students' perseverance in inner city middle schools, but felt that if it went out and developed a new intervention and then came back and provided it to teachers in inner city schools, it would never be accepted or adopted because those teachers are resource poor and have little time to learn and implement another separate intervention. The project is going into the classrooms, observing instruction, and trying to find out existing practices where perseverance support could be put in and added onto, rather than creating a separate program.

An example of a project preparing for an evaluation took place in Texas. Texas had 15 different programs hat were to improve developmental education in two-year and four-year post-secondary institutions and it wanted an evaluation of them. But it would be very difficult to propose an evaluation of 15 programs so first they applied for a two-year RPP project, find the most likely candidate programs for evaluation and to build the partnerships with the different post-secondary institutions that will be needed to do a strong evaluation project.

A third example prepared for a measurement project. The district has an early warning system for students at risk of not making academic progress and wanted to add social and emotional learning factors to that system. So, before going to a measurement project, the work under this grant was identifying such items and correlating with student education outcomes to try to find which might be the best one that would then be the subject of a measurement project where they could be fully developed and validated.

The research methods used in these projects are expected to primarily be descriptive and exploratory data analysis. The analysis may be of primary data, or it may be secondary data or a combination of both. Some projects have moved further down the continuum from exploration toward more causal analyses. They include quasi-experimental methods, such as propensity square matching. And there's obvious value in having more confidence in any associations you've found. But we are not expecting anyone to propose a full causal analysis under this grant program. If you really are ready to do an evaluation using such a rigorous design, please do apply under the Education Research Grants program or the Special Education Research Grants program under the efficacy and replication grant topic.

Here is an example of a project doing primary data collection. This project is looking at the role of paraprofessionals in the education of students with disabilities, trying to identify their level of knowledge, their range in responsibilities, their time use, their implementation of effective instructional practices and training needs. They are carrying out a survey of paraprofessionals and the teachers who supervise them to look at their responsibilities and training needs. And they're also doing direct observation of paraprofessionals in student dyads during their math and reading activities to evaluate their use of effective instructional practice. The project is to lead to the development of a training program for these paraprofessionals – lead to to a future development project.

A second example shows the use of primary data that is not district administrative data. The project is reviewing the materials teachers submitted when they applied for their teaching job to identify what kind of teacher characteristics might be better predictors of their students' outcomes than just the traditional ones that have been used in research. And at the same time, the district is interested in checking if its hiring criteria are helpful in hiring teachers who improve student outcomes or if there is other information they are collecting but not using that would be more useful when choosing new hires.

The majority of current RPP projects are analyzing secondary data, often administrative data from the district or the state, sometimes supplemented from other data sources. One project is identifying students at risk of not completing high school using historical administrative data from the district to identify what is an on-track student from elementary, middle, and high school. And then, they're computing these indicators for the current middle school students to try to identify those that are at risk of not completing high school.

Other projects combine the use of secondary and primary data. A project examining English language learners is trying to identify practices that will help these students meet newly adopted science standards. They are using the district administrative data to identify ELL performance on the standardized science test at elementary schools that have a high percentage of English learners. Then, they'll collect primary data using surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and teacher logs to find what instructional practices might be linked to EL achievement, both in schools where EL performance is on average or better than non-ELs and in schools where it's lower.

In addition to your plan for the initial research, you are to describe a second plan on how you will develop the future research based on the results of the initial research. What you're describing here is a process. You may not know the actual research to be done in the future. But how will the partners go about deciding what that plan for the future research is? Earlier I mentioned the frameworks of looking backward and looking forward. For looking backward, it's very to identify future research because that's where you started from, and this grant will be used to prepare for doing that future research. But when looking forward, that's a bit more difficult to be definitive about the actual future research. But you can certainly discuss possibilities depending on the findings of the initial research.

That's the three major sections of the project narrative. Let me go on now to the Personnel and Resources sections. When you're writing the personnel section, think about all the work you are promising to do. Then identify the person who will carry out each piece of work, their expertise or experience in doing their piece of their work, and their time allocated to the project to do that work. So, rather than only say "This person has been on 10 grants and published 60 articles" which represents work in many different areas. You want to focus in and say, "This person is responsible for the teacher survey, they were trained in survey methodology, have published extensively on teacher surveys and receive grants to carry them out, and has X% FTE to complete the survey work under this project. You want to be very specific about each person.

"This is the work to be done, here is who can do it, here is why they can do it, and they have enough time to do it as well."

You will have a PI from each of the major partners. But there has to be one overall PI. That's the person who deals directly with IES. So, the other person will become a co-PI. So, you'll have to have a PI or a co-PI from the research institution and a PI or co-PI from the education agency. IES has no preference for which partner has the PI or the co-PA. I would recommend that the PI have experience managing a grant of this type and size to avoid possible criticism from the peer reviewers. If the PI doesn't have such management experience, there should either be somebody working with the PI who has managed such a grant like this before, or perhaps an advisory panel of people who have to provide the PI with assistance and advice. And as mentioned before, the PI or co-PI from the education agency must have decision-making authority for the issue you'll be looking at. You can have multiple co-PIs from either of these two organizations or from any other partner organization as well.

RPP applications sometimes include many people from different organizations with small amounts of time commitments, each doing a piece of the project. In such cases, it can be helpful to have one person who has enough time on the project to make sure the partnership's work stays on track. If you have one investigator who's on for the summer months and another who's only on for the spring semester or something like that, questions arise about , "Who's going to keep this project moving?" That person doesn't have to be a high-level person, but somebody capable to to make sure everything gets done on time.

The Resources section is very much like the personnel section. You're identifying the institutional resources needed for this project to succeed. So, are there the resources to manage the grant and get the work to be done. And as I mentioned earlier, we're asking for a joint letter of agreement by the major partners to set out their expected roles and responsibility.

If multiple districts or schools are taking part, it's very helpful to have letters from the schools and districts stating that they understand and support whatever type of activities are to take place with them, for example a survey or observations. These letters of agreement are to be placed in in Appendix D.

If you're looking at secondary data, it's crucial to have a letter from whosever in charge of that data saying, "We will release that data for use in this project." Or at least a letter that says, "Should this project get funded, we will consider releasing the data within this timeframe under our regular regulations." The type of letter you obtain depends on local and district policy but you should at least have that letter to show that there has been contact between the project and the holder of the data.

If district and school staff are going to be actively involved, you may want to discuss how you're going to convince them to take part. Surveys or logs or observations can be a burden on teachers. So, what is the process to encourage their participation? Will there be incentives for them to take part as well? In the resources section your are to convince the peer reviewers that the work already has enough support that you won't come back in six months and say, "We can't do it. The schools, the teachers, the staff did not want to take part."

New this year is a requirement that you discuss your resources to disseminate the results of your work. We're not expecting RRP projects to come out with concrete causal findings that will have major implications. But they may identify important areas for further research and lessons on how to build research partnerships. So, you want to talk a bit about your capacity to disseminate and your capacity to disseminate to multiple audiences. Your first audience is the education agency. But this dissemination is to occur through the ongoing joint work. Other education agencies may be interested in the results of their work along with policymakers and practitioners, the research community, and the general public as well so you should think about different formats to getting information to these different groups and your capacity to use them.

That covers the research narrative. I want to touch on a couple of the other parts of the application that are important to address. Appendix A is where you discuss revisions made should you be resubmitting an application. You have three pages to discuss how you addressed the previous reviews of your application. This is very important. When the peer reviewers present to the panel, they may say, "This application did a very good job of addressing the past review" or "did not do a very good job." And that's taken very seriously. That does not mean they won't have their own issues that may not have come up in previous reviews. But they do want to see that you have addressed the previous reviews. So, please describe how you responded to all comments.

If you feel that you have changed your application so much, it really isn't a resubmission anymore; (that it's really a new application) you should note that in Appendix A. The Standards and Review Office may attach last year's or previous year's review comments to your application regardless of whether you think it is new so you should discuss why you consider it new in Appendix A. If you don't discuss the past reviews, the response will be, "They did not address the reviews." But if you take the time here in Appendix A and say, "We have changed it in these ways, so that the previous reviews are less important or don't apply anymore," that gives the reviewers something to either agree with and say "They're correct; they don't need to address the past reviews," or they may still say, "Well, some of the past reviews are still applicable, and it would be helpful if they addressed them."

Appendix B has a 15-page limit -- this is where you can put in figures or charts or tables that supplement your narrative. So, you might put in a timeline here. You might say, "We're going to use these measures to look -- this is our survey we're using with teachers," or "This is an interview protocol" -- anything like that that you're going to be using in your initial research. Or you could also put in a diagram of your the management structure or the decision-making process. But please do not include narrative text here. The Standards and Review Office will often remove any text it finds.

Appendix C, which has a page limit of 10, is in case you propose to study a specific practice, program, policy, or assessment, you may include examples of that here. So, if you're looking at a program for English learners, you may include some of the curriculum materials. Or let's say a district has a has a teacher evaluation program, you may put the teacher observation protocol they used with that teacher evaluation program in Appendix C.

Let's distinguish between what's in Appendix B and in Appendix C: Appendix B includes materials you're using to carry out your study. Appendix C includes materials that are being used in the practices, programs, or policies that you will be studying.

Appendix D has no page limit. This is where you put in all your letters of agreement, the joint letter from the key partners, separate letters from other partners, letters from schools, letters from those holding the data; letters from any consultants on the project. The letter should be more than just pro forma, "Yes, we support this study." They should set out what that organization who's writing the letter -- what their role in the study is, what their responsibility is, and that they fully understand it and they are committed to it.

You will fill out a budget and a budget narrative. The maximum length of the project is two years. The maximum award is $400,000. New this year, we have a maximum annual award of $200,000. We ask that you don't automatically come in for the maximum. The size of the award really should depend upon the scope of your project. You will include a detailed budget form, the SF-421. And you then write a narrative that links the activities and personnel you described earlier in the project narrative to the funds requested.

It;s important to show things in the budget if you promised to do them. So, for example, if you are intending to do a survey, somewhere in the budget narrative, you should note, where are the expenditures for that survey? Otherwise, the reviewer may say, "Well, they proposed a survey, but they don't have any budget for it, so they won't be able to do that." And even though it may be in your budget somewhere -- it may be under personnel, but you should break it out -- not break it out in the budget, but break it out in the project narrative and say, "Here's where the survey is going to get its funding from."

Someone has asked if we have yet provided information from existing partnerships on how their partnerships were formed. We not compiled that information. The first set of partnerships is just coming to an end. Our second set is just in their first year. And our third set is just really starting up. So, we're holding off for a year or two with the intention of doing that. Or there may be others who are involved in talking to these partnerships there are organizations outside IES that have been doing work on partnerships.

Let's review the important dates and deadlines. Our application deadline: August 6, 2015, 4:30:00. And the zero seconds is there to emphasize that point that if the server that gets your application goes to 4:30 and one second, your application will be deemed late and will not be accepted. So, we recommend applying three or four days early for several reasons. First, if there's an error in your application, there is error software, and you may get an email a day later saying, "Your application was not accepted because of error." Second, on the deadline day -- August 6th -- a lot of people are trying to apply, and the server gets very slow. Let's say you get your application in, and then somebody says, "Oh, we forgot to upload the letter from the data holder saying we can use the data. We've got to re-apply." And it's already 2:00, and the server is moving at glacial speed. You may not get the updated application uploaded in time and your application will go to review with an important missing letter. So, please try to apply earlier on in that week. Give yourself a few days just in case you catch a mistake or the software catches a mistake.

We're asking for a letter of intent on May 21st, that's next week. Letters of intent are not required. They are only strongly requested. Program officer review the letters and offer some basic information such as "Yes, this is a good program for you to apply to," or "No, you're in the wrong program." Also, the Standards and Review Office will use those letters to identify the number and types of reviewers they'll need. If you miss the deadline, you can send the program officer an email with the same information in order to get a response on your research idea. Everything you put in a letter of intent is superseded by your application. The peer reviewers don't look at your letter of intent; they only look at your application.

Someone has asked, "If one district has a co-PI, and there are other districts participating in the partnership, are they leads or are they not leads?" And that's really your choice. You can have two or three districts involved, and all can provide a co-PI. If they're all actively involved and want to be heavily involved as partners, they should have co-PIs. On the other hand, some grants come in with one or two districts as the partners each with a co-PI, and then there are other districts that are kind of watching the work being done or maybe providing some data but not actively partnering because they're interested, but they're not ready to take part yet. You may have an advisory panel that includes all these districts to which the partners regularly present their ongoing work to these outside districts who give feedback and think about do they want to be involved in the future research. Is this work going in such a direction that they're excited by it? So, let me turn that question back on you, saying, if the districts actually want to take part, yes, they should have a co-PI because they want to be involved making these decisions jointly with the research institutions. If they're less interested in taking part, give them a background role where they're still getting information and contributing, but they're not taking part as a partner, and they don't need to be a co-PI.

Someone asked, "Will you give feedback on work proposed in LOIs?" The program office will read your LOI and respond and say, first of all, "You fit under this grant topic well," or "Maybe you don't fit here as well as another grant topic," or "Maybe you'd have to adjust your research a little bit to fit better on this grant topic." Second, if they see any glaring potential problems – they will identify them. Third, they will offer you the opportunity to set up a phone call if you want to discuss your research idea further.

Let's talk about start dates. You'll submit your application by August 6, 2015. If funded, you can start the work between July 1st and September 1st, 2016. Often applicants, put down July 1st because that's the earliest start date. I suggest thinking about your best start date reflecting on when is the best end date (the project last two years) and when other resources will be available to start. For example, if researchers or agency personnel are out in July, maybe start a little later when everyone is back to work. Or maybe principals are very busy in September and would prefer to do the start up work in the summer.

This slide lists sources of information. First is the Request for Applications. We recommend that you read this before writing your LOI and talking with the program officer. There are abstracts of current RPP projects that you can look to see what others are doing. The Letter of Intents is submitted to the iesreview.ed.gov website. The application package, which contains the forms you'll use to make your submission is available starting May 21st on the www.grants.gov website. And then, here is my email if you want to get in touch with me.

Once your application is submitted, it goes through two types of screening. The compliance screening will address the physical aspects of your application, e.g., the submission of all required forms, meeting page length maximums, font sizes, and margins.

Then the application will go through a responsiveness screening. As I mentioned the Request for Applications lists requirements under each of the five sections of the project narrative. Those are the requirements that will be used to determine if your application is responsive. If it's found responsive, it will be assigned to a review panel. Two to three reviewers will look at your application first. One should be an expert in a substantive field and the other should be a methodological expert. If they score the application high enough, it will come before the full panel.

So, you're writing here for two types of reviewers. One are more specialized in your work - the initial reviewers. And then, the full panel will have people who will be generalists to your topic area and people who will have expertise in different types of methodologies. So, you want to stay away from jargon and too many acronyms because the full panel won't know them and you'll want to explain issues or methods that would not be considered common knowledge.

Applications that go to the full panel are introduced by their reviewers, discussed by the full panel, each of the five sections is scored by each panelist and each panelist gives an overall score. You'll then get email notification that the information is now on the applicant notification system at iesreview.ed.gov. The information will include the reviewer summary statement, the reviewer score for applications that went to full panel. For applications that did not go to full panel, you'll see the initial reviewers' comments. The status of your application will also be shown.

The majority of our applications are awarded on resubmissions. So, if you don't get a grant the first time, but the but the review comments are positive and addressable, then you should talk to us about a resubmission for next year.

That completes the webinar. I'll wait for a minute or two. If you have a question, please send it through the chat. If you think of a question later, you can email it to me. I appreciate you spending the last hour and a half t with me and look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Someone has asked, "Can budget funds be allocated to purchase software or hardware needed by an LEA as part of a district initiative that will be the focus of the partnership grant?" That's a bit tricky because it sounds to me like you're asking about money to support implementation of a district program or policy. That is not the purpose of the grant. So, in that case, I would say no. On the other hand, if you were the institutional analysts at the education agency need a certain type of software to do the initial research, I would say that is acceptable. For example, "We're going to do observations of teachers and the observers from the districts need software to enter and analyze the observations" that sounds acceptable because it is needed in order to do the initial research. So, the distinction I'm making is that grant funds can be used to support the research but not to support a state or district program being studied.

The PowerPoint will go up on our webinar site where you registered. And a transcript of today's webinar will follow.

Okay, it looks like we don't have any more questions. So, I'm going to sign off. Thank you very much.

[end of transcript]