The Education Research & Development Centers Competition (84.305C): An Overview

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Transcript

(Slide 1)

Welcome to the Overview webinar for the Education Research and Development Centers Competition which is CFDA number 84.305C. This year, the National R&D Center competition is being held by the National Center for Education Research. In this webinar, we will go over the general requirements of your application to the center competition as well as specific requirements of each of the two centers being competed for fiscal year 2019; Rural Education and Writing in Secondary Schools.

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This graphic represents the organizational structure of IES. We are led by a director who receives advice and consultation from the National Board for Education Sciences. The board consists of 15 voting members who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

Our Standards and Review Office oversees the scientific peer review process for IES grant applications and IES reports. We also have four centers within IES. The National Center for Education Statistics is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education.

Within NCES, you may be familiar with the NAEP assessment, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Under NCES, you will also find many large national longitudinal data sets including, for example, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. The National Center for Education, Evaluation, and Regional Assistance conducts unbiased large-scale evaluations of education programs supported by federal funds, provides technical assistance and supports the development and use of research and evaluation throughout the United States. In NCEE, you will find the What Works Clearinghouse, WWC, and the Regional Educational Labs, RELs.

The two centers that award grants are highlighted here in blue. The National Center for Education Research referred to as NCER, and the National Center for Special Education Research or NCSER. The grant opportunities that we will be talking about today are managed through NCER. You'll notice here that the research centers are separate from the Standards and Review Office meaning that we, program officers, are not involved in the peer review process.

So, this allows us to work closely with you providing technical assistance to you on your applications.

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The missions of the two research centers are similar. The mission of NCER is to support rigorous research that addresses the nation's most pressing education needs from early childhood up through adult education.

The mission of NCSER is to sponsor research designed to expand the knowledge and understanding of infants, toddlers, and students with or at risk for disability from birth through high school.

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The grant programs that are held by the two research centers have a number of objectives.

Primarily, the goal of these programs is to develop or identify education interventions that enhance achievement and can be widely deployed. Additionally, other objectives include identifying what does not work in education and understanding the processes that underlie the effectiveness of interventions.

Note that our definition of interventions is broad and can include practices, programs, policies, and approaches.

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And now for some specifics about the R&D Center competition.

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The Centers are responsible for contributing to the solution of a specific education problem and to the generation of new knowledge and theories relevant to the focus of the center.

They're also responsible for conducting relatively rapid research and scholarship on supplemental questions that emerge within the center's topic area. Finally, the Centers are responsible for providing national leadership within the center's topic by disseminating research and engaging in dialogue with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

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Each Center is responsible for a number of activities. The primary activity for each Center is the focused program of research. This is where the Center contributes to the solution of a specific education problem and generates new knowledge and theories.

You will need to allocate at least 75% of your total budget to the focused program of research. Look in the topic sections for each Center to determine the specific requirements of the focused program of research. We will also go over it later in this webinar.

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Each Center is also responsible for supplemental activities. These can be meetings or smaller scale studies. The center will work cooperatively with the Institute to select and design these supplemental activities. Therefore in your application, there is no need to provide a detailed plan for the supplemental activities. You should instead show your capacity for conducting supplemental activities and set aside at least 5% of your total budget for these activities.

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Finally, the Center will be responsible for leadership and dissemination. The Center will be responsible for engaging with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. You'll need to have a website with reports and papers and you'll need to make your final research data available for others to use as well as submit final manuscripts for papers to ERIC.

The Institute encourages centers to find innovative uses for technology. For your application, you should describe the audiences your center will intend to reach and the activities you will use to engage those audiences. Finally, you should show your capacity for leadership and outreach.

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The proposal narrative is the heart of your application where you will set out your plan of research and the justification for it. The peer reviewers focus on the center narrative. This narrative is composed of five sections and is recommended to be no more than 35 pages.

The first two sections are topic specific and will be addressed in more detail during the discussion of each individual center.

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In your proposal narrative, when you discuss leadership and outreach activities, you should make sure to discuss the audiences you intend to reach and how you will reach them.

We do expect each center to have a website where they share information with multiple audiences. Make sure you identify the researchers and practitioners you intend to work with while engaging in your leadership and outreach activities. For the management and institutional resources section, you should describe plans and procedures for overall management of the center and its activities and show capacity for supplemental activities and leadership and outreach.

If you plan to work in schools or other education delivery settings in the first year, you must include letters of agreement from educational organizations. If the developer distributor of a program or intervention is part of the center, describe their role and how objectivity will be maintained.

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For the personnel section, you should describe your team's expertise in content areas and your team's methodological expertise. In addition, you should display sufficient experience working with education delivery settings. You should demonstrate your capacity to conduct supplemental activities. Lastly, you should discuss your team's experience relevant to national leadership and outreach.

This should include explaining why the proposed center staff is qualified to fulfill the leadership role.

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Before we go into detail about the specifics of the two centers being competed for FY 2019, I want to note the duration and award maximums for the two centers. The Improving Rural Education center has a maximum duration of five years and a maximum grant award of $10 million.

The Writing in Secondary Schools center has a maximum duration of five years and a maximum grant award of $5 million.

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Corinne Alfeld:

Hello. My name is Corinne Alfeld. I'm a program officer in the National Center for Education Research. This part of the webinar will describe the "Improving Rural Education" topic of the fiscal year 2019 Research and Development Centers competition or 305C.

This webinar is not meant to substitute for the request for applications or RFA. This webinar only highlights the purpose and main sections that are required in your proposal. The full RFA includes additional recommendations and I encourage you to read it carefully.

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The purpose of the Rural Center is to build the capacity of rural schools to use high-quality scientific research to improve student outcomes as required under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

There are three components of the Center, a focused program of research, national leadership activities, and supplemental activities.

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Before I explain the components of the application, I would like to share with you several important changes to this RFA for fiscal year 2019.

First, as part of the focused program of research, this year's RFA combines two components from last year's RFA that were to support research in rural areas, a practical tool for practitioners and a statistical method for researchers. Applicants are now only required to propose a tool or a method as long as it supports research in rural areas. Applicants may choose to propose both a tool and a method if they wish.

Another change is the broadening of the acceptable focus of the research from K-12 education to include postsecondary education. We also added new language encouraging researchers to conduct at least a portion of their research in schools located in remote and/or persistently poor locations. The definitions for these locations are included in the RFA and I will go over them shortly.

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Another change for FY 19 is that we added language indicating that we will fund up to two R&D Centers under the improving rural education topic so long as they focus on different states or regions of the country and/or addressing different problems or issues in rural education. In addition, the Institute has expanded its definition of student education outcomes to include employment and earnings outcomes when appropriate.

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In this year's Rural Center RFA, we've also emphasized our expectation that the studies will be designed and carried out as partnerships between researchers and practitioners. For example, local education agencies, rural postsecondary institutions and other relevant stakeholders such as state education agencies, community college districts, state higher education systems, state higher education agencies or boards, and other state or community organizations that support rural schools.

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The focused program of research has three goals. I will provide more detail about each one here though there is much more information including recommendations for a strong application in the RFA. The first goal is to conduct a research study on a problem or issue that is of concern to rural schools.

You should explain why the problem or issue you selected is significant to education policy and practice and how the research you're proposing may help rural schools and prevent student education outcomes. For this goal, you may propose either a single large study or two or more smaller studies that will build new knowledge on how to improve education policy and practice in rural settings.

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The second part of the focused program of research is to develop a tool or strategy for conducting research in rural education settings. As I mentioned earlier, this year, you have two choices. This slide describes the first choice. You may choose to develop and test the practical tool or strategy that can help rural district or school personnel and especially those in remote rural settings overcome geographic or resource constraints that limit their ability to take part in and benefit from research.

You should make clear what problem your tool or strategy is intended to solve and present a plan that includes working with remote rural school to test the feasibility and utility of the tool or strategy. Your research plan should include an iterative process of development and testing in one or more remote rural settings.

You also have another option which I will describe on the next slide.

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Your second choice either in addition to or instead of the strategy or tool that I described on the previous slide is to develop a statistical or methodological product or procedure to be used by rural education researchers to improve the designs of their studies, analyses of their data, and interpretations of their findings.

Examples include methods, software, or guidelines, or other methodological resources. If you choose this option, you can either build on prior work or propose other approaches to strengthen rural education research. For example, you could develop methods or guidelines on how to pool data across rural settings to increase statistical power for causal studies. You may have other ideas as well which I'd be happy to discuss with you.

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Applications under the rural center topic must meet the sample outcomes and settings requirements listed here and in the RFA in order to be responsive and sent forward for scientific peer review. Regarding the sample, your research must focus on typically developing students in grades K-12 and/or postsecondary education.

You can focus on the whole system or a subset of grade or age levels. You can also include students with or at risk for disabilities in your research, but they should not be the primary focus. Regarding the outcomes, your research must include measures of student education outcomes which now include postsecondary outcomes if applicable.

The RFA has a list of all the types of outcomes that are acceptable.

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Regarding the setting, your research must be conducted in authentic K-12 or postsecondary education settings and/or on data collected from such settings. Your research settings must meet the definition of rural locales and you must plan to conduct your research in at least two different states or territories.

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As I just mentioned, you should propose to conduct research in different parts of the country. At a minimum, two different states or territories. Consider how the variation in population characteristics, state and local policies, and other contextual factors may affect student outcomes. At least some of your research should be conducted in schools that are in remote rural locations as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics, and/or persistently poor locations such as defined by the Economic Research Service.

What is our definition of a remote location? Let's go to the next slide.

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In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics came out with a census-based definition for urban, suburban, and rural locales.

Within the rural locales, there are three types: fringe which is 5 miles or less from an urbanized area, distant which is between 5 and 25 miles from an urbanized area, and remote which is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area. The RFA has a link to NCES website where you can find more information about rural locales. You can use their tools to identify rural locales that meet the remote definition.

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The Economic Research Service or ERS of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has identified over 300 rural counties as persistently poor. ERS defines persistently poor as having 20% or more of their population living in poverty over the last 30 years. This definition applies to 15.2% of all rural counties compared with 4.3% of all urban counties.

The RFA contains additional information and links to ERS statistics.

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Your project narrative must have five sections. I will go over the basic requirements and some recommendations for each of these sections. The significant section must include a description of

how you will approach each of the two goals of the focused program of research and the rural education settings where you plan to conduct your research.

For the significant section, the Institute recommends that you describe the need for an R&D center on rural education research, how you will advance theory and methods on rural education research and how you will involve local education agencies or other relevant stakeholders in your research. Please check the RFA for more recommendations for this significant section for a strong application.

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You must also have a research plan section.

IES recommends that you divide your research plan into two sections, one for each goal of the focused program of research. For the first component of the research plan, you must include a description of your plans to carry out a research study on one or more major problems or issues in rural education. You should explain the proposed research design for your major study or studies of a rural education issue or problem. More recommendations for a strong research plan are included in the RFA. (Slide 29)

For the second component of the research plan, you must describe your plans to develop and test a tool or method to conduct education research in rural settings. It can be for either practitioners or researchers or you may propose something that can be used by both. As I mentioned earlier, in last year's RFA, IES required both a tool and a method.

This year, only one is required although applicants may propose to develop both. I will present some recommendations for a strong application in the next slide but again, please check the RFA for additional recommendations.

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The Institute recommends that you explain the practical need for the tool or method and how you expect it to be applied in education research.

Identify the end users such as education researchers and/or rural practitioners and how they are expected to use the tool or method. If applicable, discuss existing similar tools or methods. Present an iterative plan for developing, testing, and improving the proposed tool or method. Be sure to include the sample, data collection, and data analysis procedures for testing the usability and feasibility of the tool or method.

Describe how you will check that the tool or method works as planned. For example, you might apply your method to the data you're collecting under your research study or to other existing data or you might use your tool in your research study, have other researchers use it in their studies or have practitioners use it as part of their own work. Finally, identify the student education outcomes to be included when checking that the tool or method provides reliable and valid results.

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The third required section of the project narrative following the research plan is leadership and outreach. In this section, you should specifically describe the activities you plan to engage in as a national R&D center on improving rural education. Examples of leadership and outreach activities include hosting a website on rural education research, hosting conferences about rural education, and disseminating information about rural education research.

See the RFA for more recommendations.

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The fourth required section of the project narrative is management and institutional resources. In this section, you must discuss any prior experience you have in managing a grant of the size. This includes experience, coordinating the work of multiple partners, managing large budgets including subcontracts, running large meetings, conferences, and videoconferences, conducting other national leadership activities and annual reporting on the activities and accomplishments of the center.

You should describe the steps you will take to ensure meaningful involvement from local education agencies and other stakeholders in the communities where you are working. It is a good idea to include signed letters of support from all partners including other researchers, practitioners, and regional or intermediary organizations, if applicable, in your application.

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Finally, in your personnel section, you should describe the roles, qualifications, and experience of the principal investigator, center leadership, and partners including expertise in content areas relevant to rural education research, the methodological expertise to carry out research in rural areas, experience working with rural school and district personnel, and experience that is relevant to the required national leadership activities.

Remember to read the RFA carefully for other recommendations regarding each section of your application.

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The following are the requirements for the grant award. You should propose a center that will exist for no more than five years, the budget of no more than $10 million. This includes both direct and indirect costs. You must allocate at least 75% of the total budget to the focused program of research and you must reserve at least 5% of the total budget or $500,000 for supplementary studies.

You do not need to describe supplementary studies in your application. They will be designed after the center is up and running. Again, my name is Corinne Alfeld and you may contact me or my colleague, Allen Ruby, if you have any questions about the Rural Center. Our contact information is in the RFA and in the last section of the webinar.

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The second National Research and Development Center being competed in FY 2019 is the Research and Development Center on Writing in Secondary Schools.

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IES is requesting applications to establish a National Research and Development Center on Writing in Secondary Schools to describe how students develop writing skills in secondary school and understand how to best support all students to become better writers and/or board to improve the ability to measure student writing.

Writing is an essential skill for communication, self-expression, and learning content knowledge, yet it tends to receive less attention as a subject of instruction than other content areas such as reading and math. Results from the most recent writing portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that one out of five students in 8th and 12th grade are unable to address writing tasks appropriately and to communicate effectively.

Despite the need for high-quality supports and interventions for secondary students to learn to write, the research in this area is relatively weak. The institute would like to establish a writing center to address some of the gaps in research on this topic.

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The Writing in Secondary Schools R&D Center must complete a minimum of two research studies.

You must propose an exploration study that addresses at least one of the following research areas: secondary data analyses of student writing in order to answer questions such as what are the features of high-quality writing or the writing difficulties of subgroups of students; longitudinal exploration of how writing skills develop over time for all students of all skill levels or research examining the role of self-efficacy and motivation in predicting writing outcomes in secondary schools.

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You also must propose either a development study or a measurement study.

The development study should be aimed at developing and pilot-testing interventions to improve writing in secondary schools. The measurement study should be aimed at the development and validation of a measure or measures of writing quality. You may propose to conduct the studies in any order you choose or concurrently. For example, you may choose to develop and validate measures of writing quality for use in the exploration study.

Alternatively, you may use the exploration study to inform the development of an intervention or the development of a measure of writing quality. However, your study should be coordinated and should be part of an overall vision of a research agenda on writing in secondary schools as opposed to disconnected or loosely connected studies of writing.

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Your research must focus on typically developing students. You may propose to examine subgroups of students which may include students with disabilities, but such students may not be the primary focus of your studies. The sample must focus on students enrolled in grades 6 through 12 regardless of the grade configuration of their schools.

You should include students from at least two grades including at least one grade from middle school, grades 6 to 8, and one grade from high school, grades 9 to 12. Your sample must include students who are low achieving in writing though these students do not need to comprise the entire sample. You must include measures of student writing and you must conduct research in an authentic 6 through 12 education setting.

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Next, I will discuss the requirements for the various sections of the Center narrative which is the main body of your application. Leadership and outreach and management and institutional resources were discussed in the opening of this webinar. I will not be going over those two sections. IES recommends your narrative not exceed 35 pages.

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In the significant section of your Center narrative, explain your understanding of the problems the center is meant to address. Propose an overall vision of the Center and describe a coordinated set of research and leadership activities.

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Include a description of your conceptual framework and/or perspective and how that theoretical framework will guide the Center's work.

In your literature review, consider the specific opportunities and challenges of writing in secondary schools including but not limited to features of high-quality writing, development or trajectories of writing skills, feedback from teachers and peers, motivation and self-efficacy or identity, content area and/or discipline, genre, technology, and assessment.

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In the research plan section, you must describe the design for each of your studies. Remember, you must include an exploration study and either a development or measurement study. You should outline the data analysis plan for each study. The Institute encourages you to identify a diverse sample with regards to factors such as writing ability, socioeconomic status, race ethnicity, and geographic location.

Describe the malleable factors you will study and how you will expect them to be associated with specific student writing outcomes as well as any mediators or moderators. Describe the intervention you will develop and pilot-test and how you will expect the intervention to improve writing outcomes for secondary students.

Explain your rationale for the features on which you choose to focus. Explain your decision to develop a new measure or revise an existing measure. If you propose to develop a new measure, contrast that new measure with current typical practice and its identified shortcomings.

If you propose to revise and validate an existing measure, describe the specific need for validating an existing measure.

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Competitive applications will have leadership and staff who collectively demonstrate expertise in content areas relevant to writing in secondary schools, the methodological and measurement expertise to carry out the proposed projects, sufficient experience working with education delivery settings to carry out the proposed projects, experience that is relevant to national leadership activities and experience and capacity to manage a project of this size and type.

Applicants are especially encouraged to include at least one team member with expertise in adolescent development.

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The following are the requirements for the grant award. The maximum duration of the Center is five years. The maximum grant award or budget is $5 million.

You must allocate at least 75% of the total budget to the focus program of research and you must reserve at least 5% of the total budget, $250,000, for supplemental activities. These need not be described in your application.

They will be designed after the center is up and running.

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Your Center narrative will also include a number of appendices, some of which are required and some of which are optional.

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Use Appendix A to describe the required response to reviewers.

How is the revised application responsive to prior reviewer comments? If you have submitted a somewhat similar application in the past but are submitting the current application as a new application, you should use Appendix A to provide a rationale explaining why the current application should be considered a new application rather than a resubmitted application.

IES recommends Appendix A not exceed three pages.

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In Appendix B, you may include figures, charts, for example, a timeline of your research project, or tables that supplement the center narrative as well as examples of measures such as individual items, tests, surveys, observation and interview protocols used to collect data for your project.

Do not include narrative text here. Appendix B is optional. IES recommends Appendix B not exceed 15 pages.

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In Appendix C, if you're proposing to explore, develop, evaluate, or validate an intervention or assessment, you may include examples of curriculum materials, computer screenshots, assessment items, or other materials used in the intervention or assessment to be explored, developed, evaluated, or validated.

Do not include narrative text. Appendix C is optional. IES recommends Appendix C not exceed 10 pages.

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In Appendix D, include the letters of agreement from partners, e.g., schools and districts, data sources, e.g., state agencies holding administrative data, and consultants.

Ensure that the letters reproduce well so that reviewers can easily read them. Do not reduce the font size or margins. Letters of agreement should include enough information to make it clear that the author of the letter understands the nature of the commitment of time, space, and resources to the research project that will be required if the application is funded.

A common reason for projects to fail is loss of participating schools and districts. Letters of agreement regarding the provision of data should make it clear that the author of the letter will provide the data described in the application for use in the proposed research and in time to meet the proposed schedule.

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All awarded centers will be required to make their final data set available for other researchers and interested parties to use.

This does not mean that your data need to be made available to anyone at any time but it does need to be available for researchers. Your data management plan should include information on what data are being collected and will be shared, the form of the final data set, how the data will be maintained and shared, and for data that cannot be shared, the process by which the data was obtained, cleaned, and analyzed so that reanalysis can be done.

Appendix E is required. IES recommends that Appendix E not exceed five pages.

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Here are the important dates and deadlines. Applications are due August 9, 2018, 4:30 p.m, DC time. Please note that the Institute does not accept late applications.

Letters of intent are optional, nonbinding, and not used in the scientific peer review of a subsequent application. The Institute also uses the letter of intent to identify the expertise needed for the scientific peer review panels and to secure sufficient number of reviewers to handle the anticipated number of applications.

The deadline for the letter of intent has already passed but you may still submit an application. The Institute asks that you inform the relevant program officer of your intention to submit an application.

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After you submit your application, our Standards and Review Office begins the peer review process.

Applications are reviewed for compliance and responsiveness to the RFA. Those applications that are compliant and responsive are assigned to a review panel where two or three panel members conduct a primary review of each application. The most competitive applications move to the full panel.

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After the peer review process is complete and decisions are finalized, applicants will receive email notification that the status of the award and the reviewer summary statement are available via the applicant notification system.

If you are not granted an award the first time, consider resubmitting and talking with your program officer.

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The recommendations for a strong application are just that, recommendations. But they are useful and are derived from the Institute's experience. Reviewers do pay attention to the recommendations.

So it is in your best interest to pay close attention to them.

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First, put yourself in your reviewer's shoes. These are people who have jobs and families and are reviewing applications in their spare time. It's going to make a big difference how clearly you can get across the information you need to get across to this reviewer. It makes such a difference for reviewers when writing is really clear and they find information very easily.

So think carefully about when to use diagrams and figures to explain complex ideas. I would definitely think about whether or not a diagram or a figure is more effective in getting your message across rather than putting it in text. Sometimes it is, sometimes it is not. So definitely think about how effective that approach is. And certainly, you don't want diagrams that contain such small print that no one can really see what you're trying to communicate.

Think about how you're going to organize the text. Think about the headings, the subheadings, and whether or not those same headings from RFA might help because reviewers are used to seeing IES RFAs. Think about when to use bullet points and boldfaced underscore key points or just catch the eye of reviewers in terms of finding that information.

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And then finally, we recommend to all our applicants to seek other's input before you submit your proposal. Try to get a strong full draft done as early as you can so that you have time to then share your draft with a colleague. Those colleagues should be both within and outside of your niche area. You want reviewers that will comb through the application with a real critical eye.

Certainly contact a program officer and bounce ideas off of them.

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If you have further questions after viewing this webinar, please contact the program officers responsible for each of the two center topics. Their contact information is listed in this slide and in the request for applications.

Thank you so much for your time and attention and we look forward to reading your applications.