Reseacher Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research

Sarah Brasiel:
Thank you for joining us today. We’re going to be talking about the researcher practitioner partnerships in education research topic. And for shorthand we're going to call this research partnerships. For this year, this is one of the two topics being competed under the partnerships and collaborations focused on problems of practice and policy grant program, CFDA-84.305H.

I'm Sarah Brasiel, and I work at the National Center for Special Education Research as a program officer. And I'm joined today by Allen Ruby a program office at the National Center for Education Research. And he'll be doing the second half of this presentation.

To begin, I'm just going to give you an overview of today's Webinar. I'm going to be talking about an overview of IES and its mission, general requirements, some of the specifics when you get down to writing your application. About the purpose and the project narrative sections, which includes significance, partnership, research plan, personnel, and resources. We're also going to be discussing other important sections of the application and making sure you're ready to prepare and submit your application.

There's a legislative mission of IES, which is to describe the condition and progress of education in the United States, identify education practices, and improve academic achievement, and access to education opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of federal and other education programs. In this slide, you see an organizational structure of IES starting with the Office of the Director and the National Board for Education Sciences. Highlighted you notice the two education research centers. The National Center for Education Research, and The National Center for Special Education Research; where Allen and I work. But these two centers are actually a part of four centers in IES. And you can see in the first box we have the National Center of Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, they do contracted evaluations. Also, the Regional Educational Laboratory Program, the What Works Clearinghouse, and ERIC.

Second, we have the National Center for Education Statistics, which collects and reports national data. They also have the state longitudinal data systems grant. And then again, our two research centers. Off to the side of Office of the Director, you will notice the Standards and Review Office. They're responsible for the peer review.

The objective of the research grants that we have at NCER and NCSER, is to answer four questions. What works to improve student educational outcomes, so, that we can disseminate it? What does not work, so, we can stop using it? What works for whom and where, so, we can use it with the appropriate people in the appropriate places? Why does it work, so, we understand how to improve education and can build on this understanding? The Director sets the Institute’s priorities which are also approved by the Board. And so, you can see that partnerships are part of the IES priorities. IES seeks to encourage education researchers to develop partnerships with stakeholder groups to advance relevance of research and usability of its findings for day to day work of education practitioners and policymakers.

Also, IES seeks to increase capacity of education policymakers and practitioners to use knowledge generated from high quality data analysis, research, and evaluation. Through a wide
variety of communication and outreach strategies. So, partnerships have become of growing importance in these priorities to help focus research on the issues that most concern polices and practitioners and help researchers communicate their findings in useful ways. Policymakers and practitioners are to have a strong role through these partnerships and setting the research agenda. And there’s to be constant communication between the researchers and the practitioners on what's being found and what further research should be done.

The partnerships, at a minimum, need to include a research institution and a state or local education agency. This topic provides an opportunity to both develop the partnership through joint initial research as well as to develop a longer-term research plan. It is intended to foster longer term research partnerships that are to continue on after the grant. So, it's an expectation that the proposed work will be collaborative from start to finish. The partners together develop the research questions, they agree on the research design and its implementation, discuss results as they come in, and the direction of the research, consider the practice and policy implications of the findings, disseminate the results, and plan future research.

Now we're going to talk about some of the general requirements. It's important that the project focus on student education outcomes. The partnership between research institutions and State Education Agencies, which we'll refer to as SEA’s, or Local Education Agencies, which we'll refer to as LEA’s. Initial research on education issue of high priority to the SEA, LEA, and disseminate substantial findings throughout the partner education agency and its stakeholders to other education agencies and to researchers. And it's important to note that this year IES has included a much stronger requirement regarding dissemination, that includes a dissemination plan.

So, one of the first requirements that's important to understand is that it must focus on student education outcomes. IES focuses on research that improves the quality of education for all students therefore all of our research must address the education outcomes of students. These student outcomes can be grouped under academic outcomes as well as social and behavioral outcomes that support student success in school.

Academic outcomes can include things like measures of academic achievement. Such as test scores, standardized tests, or researcher developed. And of course, graduation requirements or grades. They can also include measures of academic progress such as course and grade completion, high school graduation and drop out, post-secondary access, progress, and completion. Some examples of social and behavioral outcomes include for example, social skills, such as responsibility and cooperation, learning strategies, such as goal setting, self-regulated learning, attitudes like motivation and academic self-concept, and behaviors such as attendance and discipline. These academic outcomes and social behavioral outcomes are for students from pre-kindergarten through post-secondary and adult education. You can address any grade or grade range within these boundaries. For example, focus on fifth grade, examine middle school, look at transition between high school and college.

These outcomes are for students without disabilities as well as students with or at-risk for disabilities. If you’re going to work with students with or at-risk with disabilities take a look at the website posted here because there are specific requirements for how IES defines “at risk.”
Applicants proposing to study children at risk for developing disabilities must present research based evidence of an association between risk factors and their proposed sample and the potential identification of specific disabilities. The determination of at risk for disabilities status must be made on an individual child basis. And may include for example, factors used for moving children to higher tiers and a response to intervention model.

The method to be used for determining if a child is at risk for developing a specific disability must be made explicit in the application, and must be completed as part of the sample selection process. Evidence consisting only of general population characteristics such as labeling children as at risk for disabilities because they are from low-income families or are English learners is not sufficient for this purpose. In addition, applicants must identify the disability or disability categories that the sample children are at risk of developing.

IES also identifies the outcomes of interest that you would want to address by the age, grade, and education setting the students are in. For pre-kindergarten, the required outcomes are primarily those that would be considered school readiness: such as pre-reading, pre-language, vocabulary, early skills, and STEM, which is science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and social and behavioral competencies, to actually engage in school. Research must address center-based pre-K programs.

Next, we have kindergarten to grade 12. There are two categories of student outcomes. We have learning outcomes, which is the major academic subjects of reading, writing, and STEM. Such as standardized test scores, end of course exams, exit exams, and grades. Progress in the education system such as completing a course, completing a grade, being retained, graduating from high school, or dropping out. Both include the social skills, attitudes, and behaviors, that support this type of learning and progress.

Post-secondary education is defined as baccalaureate and sub-baccalaureate. The outcomes are access to, persistence in, progression through, and completion of the education program, often degree or certificates programs. You may also examine the additional outcomes of achievement in reading, writing, English language proficiency, and mathematics, for students in developmental education or bridge programs. Further, you may examine student achievement for all students in STEM courses that are a gateway to a STEM major and introductory English composition courses.

Adult education students who are 16 years or above and outside the K-12 system, are expected to be in such programs as adult basic education, adult secondary-education, adult-ESL, which is English as a second language, and high school equivalency test preparation. For example, the GED, general education development exam. For them you can examine both access through completion, as well as achievement in reading, writing, English language proficiency, and math.

Applicants are encouraged to also include outcomes accepted under the NCSER grant program, and that’s our National Center for Special Education Research. Development outcomes for younger students’ cognitive, communicative, linguistic, social, emotional, adaptive, functional, or physical development. Also, functional outcomes for older students that improve educational results and transitions to employment, independent living, and post-secondary education. You
must include one or more of the previously discussed outcomes, but should also consider outcomes specifically for the student with a disability population being studied.

The second requirement is that the application must come from a partnership, a minimum of one research institution and one state or local U.S. education agency. The Institute does not endorse a specific model of research partnerships. However, the Institute views research partnerships as going beyond two common forms of collaboration between research institutions and educational agency. The researchers hired by an education agency to perform a specific research service and to report the results to the agency. Or, the researcher has an initial research interest and obtains permission from the agency to carry out that research within the agency schools.

Each must contribute at least one PI. They may contribute other co-PI's or co-investigators. There will be one PI or PD, which is a Program Director, others will be co-PI's. The agency PI should have decision-making authority. Not needed to be the superintendent but someone who oversees the education issue. The logic here is that if decision makers are involved, they'll have access to the research, be able to assure themselves of its quality, and be more willing and able to make use of the results. It's important to ask for a joint letter of agreement from the two or more organizations setting up the partnership. It's more like an MOU or memorandum of understanding, showing that both sides agree to the work proposed. Other members of the partnership can provide separate letters of agreement.

Partnerships may be new or existing, and the research institution has a broad definition. But the key is the research institution needs to have ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research. The previous collaboration is stronger if it includes some of the same personnel and not only the same institutions. And we were talking about the partners, in the definition of a research institution, you want to show that the institution has the ability to do this type of research and it can include things like non-profit and for profit organizations, public and private institutions, and agencies, for example, colleges and universities, and research firms.

Now let's turn to the organizations that are eligible to serve as the SEA or LEA partner. This slide describes possible SEA partners. The examples are all eligible as long as they are overseeing some aspect of education, such as early learning, elementary, secondary, post-secondary, higher education, or adult education. Sometimes different types of public organizations are established to oversee a specific area of education. If there is any link to the main state education agency, it is helpful to include that agency as well. For this grant program IES uses a broader definition than the elementary and secondary education act, which is ESEA, which focuses on the primary agency responsible for supervision of public elementary and secondary schools.

Now we're going to turn to LEA's, the local education agencies. There are a number of different organizations. Individual schools or groups of schools that do not form a school district are not eligible to apply as the local education agency partner. There are several types of organizations that can be useful partners but cannot serve alone as an agency partner. Intermediate districts sometimes called service districts, that provide services to multiple districts but do not have decision-making authority over implementing programs and policies. However, they can serve as the agency partner if they do oversee the program or policy. Organizations made up of LEA's
and sometimes other organizations such as universities or practitioners.

For example, research and implementation networks that do not have decision making authority over the implementation of policies and programs within the LEA's, they need to have some sort of LEA members join as the education agency partner. Non-public organizations that oversee or administer schools such as education management organizations or charter management organizations. Those groups can be partners, but you must include the public state or district agency that oversees the schools that are involved.

There are also some very small local education agencies in some cases even having one school. These can apply as a partner, but the peer reviewers may consider that work less significant than projects involving multiple schools. State and local post-secondary systems can serve as the education agency partner. However, an individual post-secondary institution such as one campus cannot serve as the agency. The whole system must sign onto the project. But the evaluation does not have to be across the whole system. It can take place at only some of the campuses. If there's an agency that oversees the post-secondary system, its inclusion will strengthen the application. And that post-secondary system cannot study themselves.

One department or center cannot study another. Or even the whole system. An outside institution must be involved. Here's an example. Rand is studying developmental education programs across a number of Texas public two- and four year post-secondary institutions in partnership with Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and MDRC. And they're evaluating a developmental ED program with the City University of New York. So, that would be a good example.

I'm going to move onto adult ed. Title two of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act defines organizations eligible for federal funding as adult education providers including community based organizations, institutions of higher ED, public or non-profit agencies, and libraries. Here's an example: Penn State partnered with Miami Dade public schools, Chicago City Wide Literacy Coalition, and Houston Center for Literacy, which was established by city government, to examine adult education for low skilled and immigrants.

One research institution and one state or local education agency is the minimum requirement for a partnership. Partnerships may include additional partners if they will increase the quality of the research. You'll want to show that additional partners have similar interests. For example, several education agencies may face a similar problem. Only agencies located in a region, especially small districts may share common interests. So, it may make more sense to have a group of them come together. Having multiple education agencies may also increase the significance of the proposed work. For example, an evaluation of middle school reading interventions included six Oregon LEA's that were all attempting to address students with both reading and engagement problems.

Intermediate or service districts often work with multiple LEA's by providing training or support for the program or a policy being implemented. And so, it should be included in the project because of their implementation role. Similarly, sometimes states or districts contract out the implementation of a program and it's helpful to include the contracted organization as a partner.
For example, a project evaluated the impact of literacy training for pre-K teachers in Ohio run by a contractor of the state. Non-education state and local agencies may be useful partners as long as the education agency is also a partner. If you're looking at a specific population, for example, foster children, the education agency would be a partner. But you also might want to include the social service agency that works with foster children. Here's an example: there was a project that combined the Connecticut Department of Ed, the Connecticut Department of Justice, and the University Center on Children, examining education of court-involved youth. You can also include more than one research institution. Again, the point is to argue that they have a shared interest and will make unique contributions to the work.

Non-research organizations are often part of the partnership for many reasons. Including their interest in the issue, access to data, provider of services, links to the community and other organizations. For example, a project seeking to link early childhood education with kindergarten has the United Way as a partner. Because of its role in supporting early childhood education in the district and its link to stakeholders. As you add more partners, coordination becomes more difficult. So, it's important to address how the partnership will work together, keep in contact, and make decisions. One type of partnership that I would not recommend is the inclusion of multiple education agencies whose only similarity is that they have worked with the same research institution, rather than actually sharing a common education issue or problem.

The third requirement is to carry out joint research on the education issue. Having implications for student achievement and identified by the education agency as being a high priority. The research is termed “initial” because it's not expected to fully answer the research questions but to begin to address them as well as help lead to a future research agenda on those questions. IES's theory of change is that by jointly carrying out research from identifying the research questions of high importance to the agency, to developing a future research plan, the project will both strengthen the partnership and increase the agencies capacity to take part in research, and use research results in decision making.

The initial research is to prepare the partnership to carry out the type of research IES supports under the Education Research Grants Program 305-A, and the Special Education Research Grants Program 324-A, which are divided into four categories. There's exploration research, which is usually descriptive and correlation work to identify factors that may be associated with student education outcomes. They may be changeable and under the control of the education system. These factors may then become targets for the next category of work which is called development and innovation.

With development and innovation, the project is developing a new or revising an existing intervention to improve student education outcomes and then piloting it. After that we have efficacy and replication where you rigorously evaluate an education's impact on student education outcomes. And finally, there's measurement where you would develop, a new or revise an existing measure and validate it or validate an existing measure.

Capacity building as noted may come from the research activities. If the agency interested the project may also include specific activities that the partners agree will build the agencies capacity to propose, take part in and use research. Not expecting agencies to become research
organizations but more capable of taking part in and using research would be the goal. Balance of partnership and research work is really key. IES is a science agency and considers the research of equal importance as partnership development. The research should be of value to both agency and to building knowledge in the education sciences. The balance may vary by individual partnerships. For example, a new partnership may need more attention to building the partnership. We'll return to these points and initial research in the discussion of the project narrative.

Applicants must describe their plans to disseminate the findings from their project in Appendix A of their application. And they need to talk about dissemination throughout the partner agency, such as agency-wide oral briefing, a free non-technical written brief available to the public. Also, dissemination to other education agencies such as presentations at practitioner and policymaker meetings, and publications in practitioner and policymaker journals, and dissemination to the research community. For example, academic presentations and publications in peer review journals.

And this is really important, this is a new requirement that you need to include this dissemination plan in Appendix A. Failure to include Appendix A can lead to rejection of your application. Research partnership projects are expected to carry out exploratory research to identify potentially important associations between malleable factors and student education outcomes. Findings from these projects are likely to be most useful in pointing out potentially fruitful areas for further attention from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, rather than providing proof or strong evidence for adopting specific interventions.

So, it's important when writing an application that the education agency understands that all findings are to be released. Right of first review (no surprises) is helpful, but findings cannot be withheld. The education agency has to want to learn from the project. The Institute expects projects to carry out broad dissemination to multiple audiences which we just covered on this slide. And dissemination products should also be placed on ERIC.

If you're not examining student outcomes, then IES is not the appropriate funding agency for your research. Please don't view this research practitioner partnership as an easier way to get funding to do work that falls under Education Research Grants Programs, or the Special Education Research Grants Program, 305-A, and 324-A. The research partnerships are for doing some initial research in preparation for the types of work IES traditionally supports. If you are past that stage, apply under the regular grant program. This is especially true for development and evaluation projects. In some cases, an SEA or LEA is not willing to or interested in being a full partner in providing the level of involvement in the project; but, is interested in the research. In that case IES recommends applying under the 305-A or 324-A grant program, with the SEA/LEA providing a letter of agreement to support the research.

Okay, and then I’m going to -- this is the end of the first part Alan is going to be moving on for the second part, discussing research partnership purpose.

Alan Ruby:
Hi everyone this is Alan Ruby I'm joining the Webinar at this point to help describe the actual
parts of the application you'll be making to the RPP Grant Program. Before doing that though, I just wanted to reiterate the purpose of this grant program so we all start at the same place. Research Practitioner Partnership Grant Program supports partnerships of research institutions and state or local education agencies. These partnerships identify an education issue or problem of high priority to the education agency, and these issues or problems have importance implications for improving student education outcomes.

The partnership will then carry out some initial research on the education issue and as well they will develop a plan for further research on that issue that is to take place after the grant ends. During the grant the partnership is to help increase the education agencies capacity for taking part in research and using research results.

There are a number of expected products from the grant. For example, you should describe the partnership as it develops over the grant, you want to describe the education agency addressed by the partnership, you want to show your findings from the completed initial research. As well as have a plan for the partnership to carry out future research. It's important to describe the agency capacity building activities and recommendations for how the partnership could be maintained over the longer term, and then any lessons learned from developing the partnership that could be used by others in forming such partnerships.

So, these would all be things you would note in your final report to IES. But IES would also ask that you disseminate them not only throughout the education agency partner, but to other education agencies, and to researchers, through such aspects as briefings, presentations, working papers, and journal articles.

So, now let's move onto a discussion of the project narrative. This is where you discuss your proposed work and capacity to carry it out in your application. This is what the peer reviewers focus on. It contains these five sections. Each section will receive a score by the peer reviewers and then your application will also get an overall score. Under these sections, you will see a combination of requirements and these requirements are the minimal you need to address in order to be considered responsive to the request for applications, and therefore accepted for peer review, and you'll also see recommendations. And these are the issues that IES asks the peer reviewers to focus on as they rate the quality of your application.

So, we'll start with the significance section. The purpose of the significance section is to justify why your research is important and why the partnership is important. So, you're making an argument for the reason to be funded for the partnership to carry out the proposed work. So, how would you go about justifying the importance of your proposed work? Well, you want to set out the education issue or problem that is the focus of your work. And this will include some of the key research questions you want to ask about this issue or problem.

You should describe the education you'll be working in and the level you'll be working at, i.e. state, district, school, student classroom. Showing how this education issue fits well into the specific setting that you're going to study. You want to describe how it is linked to student education outcomes, the ones that Sarah discussed earlier. You may even want to provide a theory of change here showing how the issue works its way to affecting those education
outcomes. You want to provide some evidence that this education issue is a priority for the agency. A key reviewer comment -- a detrimental comment is that sometimes projects seem to be primarily of interest to the researcher and really not of priority for the education agency.

You want to describe how what will be learned from the research will be useful to the education agencies practice. Again, sometimes reviewers point out that the research proposed seems somewhat academic and therefore distant from being of great use to the state or local education agency. Now, you're not going to discuss the actual research in this section that will come up in the third section under the research plan. But you do need to provide enough information on the issue and how you're going about looking at it to help justify its significance here. You want to describe any ongoing work the agency is already doing on this issue or problem. And then of secondary importance, but still of interest: is how important this education issue is to other education agencies and to the field of education research?

So, just an example of a priority issue that has come up a number of times in past projects. We have three RPP grants looking at pretty much the same issue. The transition of students from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. And so, how can kindergarten, which is normally under the state or local education agency, be aware of pre-kindergarten school readiness when they come into kindergarten? Because pre-kindergarten is so widely dispersed about type and management it's often very difficult for kindergarten to know much about the students coming in. And these projects are working in their locales to provide more information, identify data on pre-kindergarteners that would be of use to kindergarten to prepare for their kindergarten matriculation.

So, let's now move onto the partnership section. In the partnership section, you need to layout who is in the partnership and why they are important to be there. So, you want to describe all the partners, highlight the research institution, and the primary education agency, as that is a requirement. And then identify other members of the partnerships and then discuss their common interests, how they complement one another in the proposed work, and how everyone will contribute to the work and benefit from the partnership.

You should not assume that reviewers will know your partners by name, so you should spell out who they are and what they do. You should describe any past work the research institution and the education agency has done together on any education issue and on this issue in particular. And the past work the research institution has done in general with state and local education agencies, showing that it has experience in such research partnerships. You will discuss the stage of the partnership, it maybe early, a new partnership. In which case, there may be more need for introduction and constant contact to build trust between the partners. Or it may be a long-term partnership that of a mature partnership and therefor there may be more confidence that it can work well together. But again, it then raises the issue why does it need a grant if it has an ongoing partnership. But you may point out the partnership is going to work in a new field or a new area or there are new personal involved and therefore this type of grant is appropriate.

Of great concern to the reviewers is that the education agency has clearly set the research questions and they address its needs. Make this case and then the follow up case is that the research institution and personnel have an interest in this education issue being addressed. Note
any other research partnerships the agency has in place and whether or not they overlap on this education issue, and how well those partnerships are working.

You do want to spend some time on the management structure. And this is especially important when there are multiple institutions involved. Or multiple offices within the education agency that have to be coordinated. And I mentioned earlier about our Early Learning RPP grants looking at the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. One of them is quite complicated. The research institution involved is the University of Miami. The main education agency is Miami Dade County Public Schools, which is in charge of the kindergarten program. There is also something called the Children's Trust which is an independent special school district set up to support children and families. And it has data and data sharing and dissemination responsibilities.

In addition, there are two of the major preschool providers. There's the Early Learning Collation of Miami Dade and Monroe, which has about 12,000 children in preschool. There is also the Miami Dade Community Action Agency and Human Services which runs the Head Start Program, providing head start to over 6,500 children. Finally, there's the Children's Registry, which tracks preschool children with disabilities all across Florida. So, this is a very complicated project, multiple partners. You can imagine the difficulties here setting up data-sharing agreements, building trust between all these different agencies that have their own areas of responsibility.

And moving from that point to the issue of data: this is another area of concern for peer reviewers. Where will the data be kept? If it’s not at the agency, will the agency have easy access to it after the end of the project, who will have access to the data? The project team, will outside researchers be able to get access to it if they apply? There are multiple opportunities here to build data, to merge data sets, to place researchers inside education agencies to help them develop their own data systems. And the creation of such a data system can be of benefit to the SEA and LEA as well as part of building the partnership.

One other issue is what are the long-term expectations for the data? Oftentimes lawyers are brought in to write agreements on the data sharing and it’s important to keep in mind that such agreements may want to go longer than the project. The project is only to be two years, and if the partners want to keep using the data in the future, any data agreements should be open ended to allow future use of the data to prevent the data from being destroyed or no longer able to be accessed after the end of the project.

In the partnership section, you’re also going to discuss a partnership development plan. Part of development is how will decisions be made by the partners? These are such decisions: Where should the research direction go as initial findings are made? What type of capacity-building activities should be done? How will research results be released? How to develop future research plans? So, the point here is to make very sure that the education agency is an active participant in all of these decisions. You want to avoid the appearance that the agency is just a bystander.

The second part of the plan should include capacity building. How will this project increase the educations agency's ability to participate in and use research? So, the joint work to be done by
these projects, developing the research questions, implementing primary data collection, reviewing findings, proposing further analysis, and dissemination, are all expected to help an agency build such capacity.

Agencies, obviously, have different capacities in regard and they will have different goals in building their own capacity. We are not expecting the agency to end up being able to do its own education research. Unless that is a stated goal of the education agency. If so, the agency can ask for specific technical support on building certain skills or building datasets the agency wants to be able to draw in the future.

For example, we've had agencies ask that their capacity be built in order to co-develop questionnaires, co-implement questionnaires, and learning about such things as interrater reliability, workshops held with teachers on using the results from a new assessment, interpreting results from a data analysis. And often, agencies include multiple offices in this work in order to build interdepartmental cooperation. For example, projects that work with English language learners often bring together staff from the ELL office and perhaps the Reading or Math office -- specific offices, to work together on an issue of let's say reading for ELL's.

Just some other examples from existing projects. One project, the Research Institution helped the district develop assistance for responding to data requests. And they created an inventory of past and current research requests, an application process, and provided sample agreements that the district could make with researchers interested in doing research of interest to the education agency. In another example, looking at school improvement in a district, the agency found it had data on these schools that were involved in school improvement across multiple departments. And the project merged that data into one data set that could be used to act for analysis by the agency.

In addition, in the partnership section you should discuss how you'll track how the partnership is going. So, you want to be able to monitor the success of the project from during the project and after the grant ends as well. And approaches taken -- there's a continuum of how this work is done through collaborative meetings, through formal tracking and reporting procedures. Some projects have an advisory panel that takes on this role. Other projects even have an independent person who interviews the people on the project and discusses how well deadlines are being met and are people taking on the roles they were supposed to. There's obviously a cost trade off involved in this. As you go further down the continuum, you have less funds for the research as you're spending more funds for tracking the progress. So, that's a determination the partnership should make.

But overall, we expect that the partnership will have regular meetings as noted in many of the final reports. On these grants ongoing communication has turned out to be the key to the success of the partnership. Researchers and practitioners often come in with different expectations and a different language. And through this ongoing communication, they learn what is actually possible to be done and how to communicate it to one another.

There is often a difficulty though of identifying meeting time. Many district personnel though have regularly scheduled meetings, and it may be possible to build in the researcher contact with
them during these meetings. And it may be necessary that different personnel from the district will attend these meetings at different times if they can’t make a commitment over the course of the two years. As well, IES is open to any field-generated measures that you might think are useful ways of keeping track of how the partnership is proceeding.

So, we'll now move onto the research plan section. There are actually two plans that you'll discuss in the research plan. One is for how you'll carry out the initial research, and second how you will design the future research that should follow this project.

So, in the initial research: you discussed in your significant section the education issue you wanted to do research on and described and justified the importance of this research. So, you want to be very clear in this section how you'll answer the research questions. You'll probably want to restate them here. How answering them will help understand the education issue you're focused on, and how it will provide useful information to the education agency. You'll then cover the specifics noted here on the slide. For example, the sample, the setting, the measures of course, including the student education outcomes you'll be looking at, your actual research design, and the data analysis. And these should all be linked, then, to how they can then answer the research questions on the education issue you're looking at.

When thinking about this section there are two ways you may want to frame the initial research: either you're working forwards or you're working backwards. So, working forwards is when you know you have a gap in knowledge. And this gap is preventing the education agency from making decisions based on evidence.

So, just two examples from existing projects. In one state, the state was finding that high school students who had gone into the juvenile justice system and then came back to high school were not well prepared and were dropping out from high school. But at the same time the juvenile justice system was supposed to be providing some education to them. So, the state wanted to find out how much education where the students learning when they were inside the juvenile justice system and what could be done maybe to offer more education opportunities, so that they could then come back to the high school to be better prepared for graduation. So, their gap was they didn't know what kind of education was occurring with students in the juvenile justice system and they wanted to find out so they could build on that.

A second example was a district wanted to learn more about the success of its English language learners. But it was not able to identify those English language learners who had graduated out of the ELL program and were now in the main stream student program. So, part of the project was actually to develop such an indicator that would go into the state administrative data system, so that they could identify students who had started as EL's and were now part of the main stream student population. So, that they could then do research on how students were doing. This was very important because comparisons of existing EL's with the mainstream population showed that existing EL’s were doing worse academically and behaviorally. But once all EL's existing and those who had graduated out where looked at they found that EL's, which they called every EL's, did about the same as students who had never been EL’s. And this then contributed to their work with EL's in general.
So, the other approach to framing was working backwards. So, you know what you want to do in the future, what type of future research you want to do. So, what do you need to do now to prepare for that research under an RPP grant? So, I'll give you two examples of projects. For example, one project wanted to work on improving inner city student's perseverance. And so, what they didn't want to do, though, was introduce a brand-new program that teachers would have to implement separately from all the other teaching responsibilities they had. So, they went into the schools and classrooms to observe teacher's instructional practices to try to find places and opportunities where perseverance instruction could be inserted and so there would not need to be a separate program developed.

In a second RPP grant looking at Texas community colleges. Texas was found to have 15 different programs to improve developmental education in both its two-years and four-year institutions. And Texas wanted to evaluate them but evaluating 15 programs at one time is probably not realistic. So, this RPP project went in to try identify more likely candidate programs for a full evaluation. So, using some correlational research to try to identify programs linked to student's success in developmental education. And as well had built the partnerships with the colleges that would allow a strong research design to be used in the future to evaluate the program. And as a result, it has led to what is now an ongoing evaluation program of developmental education.

So, looking at the research methods you might use. Primarily quantitative descriptive research and exploratory data analysis. This may include primary data collection analysis or secondary data merging and analysis. Combining both and often supplemented with qualitative analysis, such as case studies, interviews, focus groups, and artifact review.

So, some projects have moved a little further down the continuum between exploratory and causal analysis. They also include some quasi-experimental methods such as propensity score matching. I mean there's obvious value in having more confidence in any associations you find. But we are not expecting you to propose a full causal analysis that should be done under the Education Research Grant Program, Special Education Research Grant Program, or State and Local Evaluation Grant Program.

Just some examples from existing projects. For example, primary data collection. One project wants to develop more efficient means to train and evaluate their paraprofessionals who take part in the education of students with disabilities. But they first wanted to determine the level of knowledge, the actual responsibilities, and time use, use of instructional practice and training needs, of these paraprofessionals. So, they carried out a survey of the paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers to look at the responsibilities and training needs. And then they did direct observations of 50 paraprofessionals working with students during math and reading activities to examine their use of effective instructional practices.

The concept of primary data may be, you know, may be different in some cases. For example, another project is looking at the application materials that were submitted by teachers applying for positions inside the school district to see was there information in those materials that would be good predictors of how well the teachers would do in instruction. In the short term, they did find some interesting information from recommendation letters and this led to changes in how
recommendation letters were actually gathered for these teachers. And in the long term, it has led to some other ideas for follow on research. On how to gather other information that can be useful in hiring teachers.

Secondary examples, most projects analyze secondary data from administrative data from the agency or from other sources. So, for example, a project in San Diego was looking at how to identity students at risk of not completing high school using a long range of historical administrative data from the district. Looking at on track -- trying to identify what is on track student performance in elementary middle and high school. And then computing on track indicators for all middle school students in the district. And these measures are then distributed to teachers and school leaders. This has led to a new project looking at trying to predict students in middle school who will have trouble with Algebra one and intervene before their supposed to take Algebra one in the eighth grade.

Then the second plan you'll develop is your plan for future research. It's very important here to describe the process the partnership will use to determine the future work. I mean, if you're working backwards you have an idea of what future research you want to do. But if you're working forwards you may not know exactly. And you may give multiple types. You may say, this current work could lead to exploration work or it might lead to development work depending on what we find. But the key issue here is to describe the process the partnership will use to determine the future work. And then -- I mean, this can be as defined as sitting a research agenda or it maybe you even want to propose that the partnership will develop a proposal to submit to IES or to some other -- to a foundation or to some other funding agency as a product of the work.

Moving on to the last two sections now of the project narrative, the personnel, and the resources section. Under personnel, just a reminder, that the PI can be from either the research institution or the education agency. That's a decision the partnership should make. And we've had projects that had either one of those people being the key personnel. But you must have a PI and a co-PI from one or the other organization.

We do want, you know, the PI or co-PI from the education agency to have some decision-making authority over the issue being examined. And the purpose here is that they'll be highly involved in the research, the results will be coming back to them, and they can then directly use what's learned from this project in their day to day work. It doesn't have to be transferred up a chain of command to them. That said, decision making doesn't mean final decision making, it doesn't have to be the superintendent of a district. But it should be someone who has district-wide oversite or a role in the implementation or addressing the education issue across the district or the state.

Now in the personnel section you really want to think about the work you are promising to do. And you want to identify each person on the project team, their expertise or experience in doing the work, and their time on the project to do the work. So, you want to say language such as so and so's experienced and an expert in survey methodology is shown via these past three projects they worked on. The six papers they co-authored, and they will be in charge of the survey we are going to do and they are on the grant for ten percent of their time a year, which is enough
time to oversee the survey and analyze it. So, in sum, the personnel section should identify what work is to be done, who will do it, how they have the expertise and experience to do it, and how they have enough time to do it. And you may want to orient your bio sketches in the same way.

Because this is a partnership grant, it is helpful to identify anyone on the project team who has done partnership research work as well as research. In addition, the PI should have experience managing a grant of slightly smaller or a grant of this size. And there should always be one key person with enough time to keep the partnerships work on track. If everybody is on the partnership for 10 percent or 12 percent, or five percent, the peer reviewers often say, but who's going to keep this thing going? There's nobody really there. It doesn’t even have to be a PI or co-PI it can be some other position. But somebody who is there long enough to always push it along to make sure no one forgets the project needs to be continued.

Like the personnel section, you’re identifying the instructional resources needed -- I’m sorry the institutional resources needed for the project to continue. Very important to this is providing a joint letter of agreement by the two major partners or additional partners if they sign on that lays out their expected roles and the expected responsibilities for this work. It's very important for the peer reviewers to see that both organizations have signed on to do the research described in the application.

And you can go further regarding these letters. If there are schools or districts taking part, it's helpful if you can have some letters from them. For example, surveys are being done, or case studies are taking part, or focus groups are involved, it's a stronger application if there's a sign that the district and schools are willing to take part. If secondary data is being analyzed it's very important to have a letter from the organization that is responsible for the data that they are willing to provide the data for this purpose. And that should be included as well.

If district and school staff are taking part in surveys, observations, and logs, it's important to discuss how their cooperation will be obtained. Is this part of their regular work or part of the regular surveys they take part in? Will incentives be used? Will principals or assistant principals take part in encouraging them to be involved? Obviously, all of these are tradeoffs. It takes much more time and energy to get such letters ahead of time, but it also makes your application that much stronger. And the peer reviewers are much more likely to believe that the partnership can accomplish what is been proposed if this type of information is available.

In your resources, you're also going to describe what resources you have to implement the dissemination plan which we'll talk more about under Appendix A. So, you want to have a dissemination plan that will address -- well, we'll talk about that. You're going to have to have the resources to address the audiences for your dissemination plan. So, you're trying to reach across the education agency, you're trying to reach out to other education agencies, policies, and practitioners. And you're trying to reach out throughout the research community. For example, through presentations at professional conferences and journal articles. And you also may want to be reaching the public. So, having people with this type of experience or having offices involved with this type of experience which show that you have the resources to do such dissemination.

So, beyond the research narrative there are a set of Appendices that are also looked at by the peer
reviewers, as well as your budget and budget narrative. And I'll quickly run through those. As I mentioned, Appendix A is a new requirement this year. You must have an Appendix A to be accepted for peer review. So, how will the results be disseminated throughout the partner agency? And we suggest that there be an agency wide briefing and a free non-technically written brief that can be available to the public as well as the agency and other agencies. As well as dissemination to other agencies, maybe presentations at practitioner and policy maker meetings, publications in practitioner and policymaker journals. And then, dissemination throughout the research community through academic presentations and publications in peer review journals.

Appendix B, only if you are resubmitting an application. You have to discuss how you responded to previous peer reviewer comments. It is very important that you respond to all comments. Often at the peer review one of the peer reviewers will be a previous peer reviewer. So, they will make a comment about did you respond to previous comments or not. On the other hand, if you're resubmitting an application but you think it has changed so much that the previous comments are no longer applicable, you can use these pages to make that argument why in this Appendix.

Appendix C is optional. Here you will provide materials that may relate to the initial research and to the partnership. You may provide diagrams of the partnership management structure, calendars of meetings, data tables, you may put in a time line for your work, fidelity of assessment protocols you'll use in focus groups, or survey items. But please do not provide any narrative text here. You're really providing examples of measures you'll be using or time lines, or figures and charts, or tables.

In Appendix D, if the education issue you're looking at, for example, is some type of instructional or social behavioral intervention and you can provide examples of that. So, for example if you wanted to look at a professional development program, you can include training documents here. If you're looking at an online teaching program, you could show computer screen shots from that program. Again, please do not include narrative text. Now so, the clear difference between Appendix D and Appendix C, Appendix C is where you put in information that will be relevant to the actual research you'll be doing. So, how will you carry out that research? Appendix D is information on what your research might be looking at, the actual education issue or program that you'll be looking at in your research.

Then Appendix E is where you put your letters of agreement. We encourage multiple letters, the joint letters from the key partners, other letters from organizations involved, letters from any consultants, districts, schools, letters from the organizations holding data that you'll be using. And we really like these letters to include very specific details setting out what this organization is doing on this project and that they are committed to doing that work for the project.

You'll also provide a budget and a budget narrative. The maximum project length is two years. The maximum award is $400,000 but the size of the award depends on the scope of the project. It's very important to make the budget narrative very clear about all the activities being done on the project. So, for example if you say you're going to do a survey, that normally won't show up well in the budget. But in the budget narrative you might point out so and so personnel costs are going to the survey. So, and so duplication costs are going to printing out the survey. If the
survey is done online, we're going to spend this funding to put it online and to collect it. And so, and so we will be analyzing the data and they're listed in the personnel section under their budget.

There is no requirement that the grant be equally divided among the partners. And in some cases, districts or states are not administratively set up to receive and report on grant funds, or use grant funds in specific ways, such as hiring people, or funding travel. If this is the case, just state that. Say the reason why the grant is primary going to the research institution is that the state agency is not allowed to use grant funds. However, the research institution will be providing funds of use to the agency. For example, travel to the PI meeting, perhaps hiring a researcher to work at the education agency to work on the data or something like that. On the other hand, if the education agency can use grant funds there's no reason why funds cannot be used for education agency personnel to fund existing personnel or new personnel to carry out the work of this grant program.

Please do not act as if the research institution is a contractor. So, sometimes we see sub-awards come in with the education agency is the prime providing the PI and the sub-award is coming from a research institution that just says we're getting a fixed cost to do X-work. That's not the purpose of these grants; they are to be partnerships both in the work done and in the budgeting done as well. And so, the budget should reflect that as a sub-award this is a partnership between these two institutions.

So, the important dates and deadlines are listed in the request for application. IES asks for but does not require a letter of intent in which you set out who's involved, what type of work you intend to be doing. They are reviewed by the program officers who then send you back feedback. They also are looked at by the Standards and Review Office to help give them an estimate of how many applications and what type of peer reviewers they need to recruit for the peer review process. But nothing in your letter of intent is used in the actual review. Everything is superseded by the information in your application. So, you actually may change the focus of your research. In some cases, different partners actually join on between the time of a letter of intent and the application.

The application package will be posted on grants.gov and an application deadline will be given. The application deadline normally has a time deadline of a date and 4:30, and zero, zero seconds p.m. That zero, zero seconds is actually a real deadline. Applications must be in before that time if they come in at 10 seconds after 4:30 they're considered late and aren't accepted for review. And for that reason, we ask that you try to upload your application several days before the deadline because on the deadline date the server becomes very slow. Also, if you upload early there is a program to check for mistakes and you may receive an e-mail saying you made a mistake in your application. So, if you upload early, you can correct the mistake and resubmit your application.

Also in the RFA will be your possible start dates for the grant. It's in the past been running between July and September and we ask you to consider what is the best start date. If everybody is on vacation in July, there's no reason to start in July. It may be better to start in August. If for example, you're a research institution and you're expecting post docs or graduate students to work on the project they may not arrive until August and September. Again, starting in July may
just sort of be a waste of a month.

So, other information sources, the request for applications is on this webpage. You may want to look at abstracts of previous grants on our search engine for them. You would search under the Research Practitioner Partnership Program. Letters of intent are provided on this webpage. The application can be downloaded from grants.gov and Sarah and my e-mail are here.

Once applications are received on time, they are turned over to the Standards and Review Office which is in charge of the peer review process. And they will be screened for compliance. If they include all the sections of the project narrative. They are also looked at for responsiveness. Remember, I mentioned earlier that the request for application has requirements built into it so they'll be screened for meeting those requirements. If those aren't met the application will not be accepted.

They are then assigned to review panel. Two to three reviewers will look at your application. One is to have a methodological expertise and one a substantive expertise in the area you're proposing to do research on. If those initial reviewers give a high enough score it will then be sent to full panel, where it will be reviewed by anywhere from eight to twenty people, depending on the number of applications and the size of the panel.

Many of the panelists will be generalists to your topics. So, you need to write both for specialists and for generalists in education research. However, the panel will probably contain experts in all the methodologies you propose, be they data analysis, or survey, or focus group. So, you want to make sure that in any type of methodology you include enough detail to convince such a person that you know what you're doing and that the method is being used in the proper manner.

You will then get a score. The panel will provide a score on each of the five sections of the application of the research narrative and an overall score as well. You'll go on to our application notification system and you'll set up an account. And through that account you'll receive an e-mail notification that you can check the summaries from the reviewers. And you'll see your score. If you aren't granted an award the first time we definitely suggest talking to the program office and consider resubmitting as the majority of applications are funded after they have been resubmitted one time, at least.

And again, because we are not involved in the peer review process the program officers are open to working with you. We can work quite closely with you as you develop your application. So, please contact either Sarah, or myself, as you consider writing an application and before you submit one.

[end of transcript]