

Strengthening Program Evaluation Capacity:
Building Evidence of Effectiveness of Strategies to Increase
Postsecondary Student Success Network

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): 84.429A

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

Application Package Available:	August 29, 2024	https://www.grants.gov/
Optional Letter of Intent Due:	October 3, 2024	https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit
Application Deadline:	11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Time on November 14, 2024	https://www.grants.gov/
Anticipated Start Date:	July 1, 2025	
See the companion IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) for guidance on preparing and submitting applications through Grants.gov.		

Table of Contents

Part I: Overview	3
A. Background	3
1. About IES	3
2. About This Program	3
B. Getting Started	4
1. Technical Assistance for Applicants	4
2. Eligible Applicants	4
3. Building Your Team	4
4. Engaging the Campus Community	5
5. RFA Organization and the IES Application Submission Guide	5
C. Ensuring Your Application is Forwarded for Scientific Peer Review	5
1. On-time submission	5
2. Compliance	6
3. Responsiveness	6
D. Award Limits	6
E. Requirement for Grantees to Use Persistent Identifiers (PIDs)	6
F. Data Sharing Requirement and Public Access to Research	6
Part II: Competition Requirements and Recommendations	8
A. Overview and Planned Activities of the Network	8
1. Competition Purpose	8
2. Year One (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)	8
3. Year Two (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027)	9
4. Year Three (July 1, 2027 – June 30, 2028)	9
B. Research Team Application Requirements	10
1. Overview	10
2. Learner Outcomes	10
3. Settings	10
4. Interventions	10
C. Project Narrative Requirements and Recommendations	11
Part III: Preparing Your Application	15
A. Overview	15
B. General Formatting	15
1. Page and Margin Specifications	15
2. Page Numbering	15
3. Spacing	15
4. Type Size (Font Size)	15
5. Citations	16
6. Graphs, Diagrams, and Tables	16
C. Required and Optional Appendices	16

1. Appendix A: Engagement and Dissemination Plan (Required).....	16
2. Appendix B: Supplemental Charts, Tables, and Figures (Optional)	17
3. Appendix C: Letters of Agreement (Required)	17
D. Other Narrative Content.....	17
1. Project Summary/Structured Abstract.....	18
2. Bibliography and References Cited	18
3. Human Subjects Narrative.....	19
4. Biographical Sketches for Key Personnel	19
Part IV: Competition Regulations and Review Criteria.....	20
A. Funding Mechanisms and Restrictions	20
1. Mechanism of Support.....	20
2. Funding Available.....	20
3. Special Considerations for Budget Expenses	20
4. Program Authority.....	21
5. Applicable Regulations.....	21
B. Additional Requirements	21
1. Pre-Award.....	21
2. Post-Award.....	21
C. Cooperative Agreement Terms	23
D. Overview of Application and Scientific Peer Review Process.....	23
1. Submitting Your Letter of Intent	23
2. Multiple Submissions.....	23
3. Application Processing.....	24
4. Scientific Peer Review Process.....	24
5. Review Criteria for Scientific Merit	25
6. Award Decisions	25
Part V: Compliance and Responsiveness Checklist.....	26
Part VI: Required Codes for Item 4b of the SF 424 Cover Sheet.....	27

Part I: Overview

A. Background

1. About IES

Congress established the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA – P.L. 107-279), in part to improve academic achievement and attainment and access to educational opportunities for all learners (ESRA, § 111.b.1.B), with a particular focus on low-performing learners (ESRA, § 115.a.1) and those lacking access to high-quality educational opportunities (ESRA, § 115.a.2.A and 115.a.2.B). In carrying out this mission, we are committed to ensuring that our work is objective, secular, neutral, and nonideological; free of partisan political influence; and free of racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias (ESRA, § 111.b.2.B).

2. About This Program

IES supports a range of activities, including technical assistance programs, that encourage the conduct and use of scientifically valid education research and evaluation throughout the United States through its National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE). NCEE has launched its Strengthening Program Evaluation Capacity grant program (SPEC; ALN 84.429A) to build individual and organizational capacity to conduct high-quality evaluations that are designed in accordance with standards identified by IES's What Works Clearinghouse (<https://whatworks.ed.gov/>).

In this Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 request for applications (RFA), NCEE is establishing the Building Evidence of Effectiveness of Strategies to Increase Postsecondary Student Success Network (SPEC-PS). We are seeking up to 5 research teams to join this new Network.

SPEC-PS will seek to build the capacity of employees of (1) state higher education agencies and/or (2) consortia of 2-year or 4-year colleges or universities (see Eligible Applicants in Part I-B-2) to design and conduct rigorous evaluations of postsecondary student success interventions (that is, policies, programs, or services designed to improve one or more of the postsecondary outcomes listed in Part II-B-2) implemented at more than one Title IV participating institution within or across states ("at scale").

IES specifically seeks to build the capacity of eligible applicants who, absent this support, might not otherwise be able to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to plan and execute rigorous studies of student success interventions.

Note: The FY 25 SPEC-PS competition is supported by funds appropriated for activities authorized by the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA). **As such, proposed interventions must be allowable under one or more HEA programs.** The intervention to be evaluated does not need to be supported in whole or in part by federal funds (e.g., the impact of campus childcare centers on postsecondary students' outcomes could be evaluated even if the centers being studied were not receiving funding from an HEA program, such as the Child Care Access Means Parents in School [CCAMPIS] program). **Because the focus of this network is postsecondary student success, interventions focused solely on college access would not be deemed responsive to this RFA.**

If funded, grantees will enter into a cooperative agreement with IES. Grantees will be expected to participate in a 3-year program of training, coaching, and technical support provided by a Network Lead that IES will identify separately. Those activities will be designed to enable Network members to conduct a high-quality local evaluation of an eligible student success intervention of their choice. Some activities will be done individually as a project team, while others will be done as a Network. A detailed list of activities can be found in Part II-A of this RFA. Other grantee commitments can be found in Parts IV-B and IV-C of this RFA.

Grantees should carefully review the planned activities associated with this program, outlined below, when considering the student success intervention they plan to implement. As shown there, Year 1 of each project focuses on capacity-building and intervention planning, Year 2 focuses on intervention

implementation, and Year 3 focuses on evaluation. Multiyear interventions, or interventions that require multiple years to yield observable outcomes, may be less well-aligned to this competition than other student success strategies.

B. Getting Started

1. Technical Assistance for Applicants

IES provides technical assistance to applicants about the appropriateness of ideas for this competition or other substantive issues. We particularly encourage applicants to speak with the IES program officer about their planned intervention and its likely outcomes. IES program officers can work with applicants at any time up until the time of grant submission. The program officer(s) for this competition are:

Dr. James Benson
James.Benson@ed.gov
(202) 245-8333

If you submit a letter of intent (LOI) on the IES Peer Review website (<https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit>), a program officer will contact you regarding your proposed project.

IES also offers webinars (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/webinars/index.asp>) for general guidance on grant writing and submitting your application.

2. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are State higher education agencies or public or private institutions of higher education, as defined in section 101 of the HEA (20 U.S.C. 1001). Applicants that are public or private institutions of higher education must lead the activities of a consortium comprised of at least two public or private institutions of higher education, as defined in section 101 of the HEA.

IES is committed to broadening institutional participation in its research grant programs.¹ IES encourages applications from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs) that meet the eligibility criteria for this RFA. MSIs include Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions, and Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions.

3. Building Your Team

Each applicant **must** name a single Principal Investigator (PI). The PI has the authority and responsibility for ensuring grantee participation in network activities and the appropriate use of federal funds and the submission of required scientific progress reports. The PI is the primary point of contact with IES. The PI is designated by the entity submitting the application.

¹ Section 114 of the Education Science Reform Act of 2002 charges IES with undertaking “initiatives and programs to increase the participation of researchers and institutions that have been historically underutilized in Federal education research activities of the Institute, including historically Black colleges or universities or other institutions of higher education with large numbers of minority students.”

Other personnel having authority and responsibility for the evaluation and use of grant funds should be designated as co-Principal Investigators (co-PIs). Even if two or more people will share equivalent amounts of authority and responsibility for the proposed work as co-PIs, only one of them may be identified as the PI.

To promote high-quality implementation of an applicant's postsecondary student success intervention *and* objective evaluation of that intervention's effectiveness, responsibilities for intervention, applicants should plan to have separate (non-overlapping) implementation and evaluation teams. For example, the PI may have ultimate authority for the evaluation study and a co-PI have ultimate authority for the intervention's implementation, or vice versa.

All IES work benefits from diverse perspectives. NCEE's ability to support high quality evaluation depends on our ability to train and support talented researchers, statisticians, and evaluators that reflect this diversity. As such, IES encourages principal investigators and personnel who bring different backgrounds, perspectives, interests, and experiences to address complex education problems to apply (<https://ies.ed.gov/aboutus/diversity.asp>).

4. Engaging the Campus Community

Engaging communities that are meant to benefit from research, development, and evaluation activities has the potential to improve the quality, usefulness, and use of IES-funded research. As part of this program, IES recommends—and in some instances requires—that applicants describe how members of the campus community have been, and will continue to be, engaged in the design and execution of activities funded under this grant. This includes current students, both undergraduate and graduate, enrolled at participating institutions. Specific expectations are detailed in Part C, Project Narrative Requirements and Recommendations.

5. RFA Organization and the IES Application Submission Guide

To submit a compliant, responsive, and timely application, you will need to review two documents:

- *This RFA* provides information on how to prepare an application that is compliant and responsive to the requirements. [Part I](#) sets out the requirements for a grant application. [Part II](#) describes the requirements and recommendations for this competition. [Part III](#) provides information about general formatting and other narrative content for the application, including required appendices. [Part IV](#) provides general information on competition regulations and the review process. [Part V](#) provides **a checklist that you can use to ensure you have included all required application elements to advance to scientific peer review**. [Part VI](#) provides the topic code that you must enter in Item 4b of the SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance form.
- *The IES Application Submission Guide* (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) provides important information about submission procedures, IES-specific guidance and recommendations, and file size limits to help you ensure your application is complete and received without errors on time through Grants.gov.

We strongly recommend that both the principal investigator (PI) and the authorized organization representative (AOR) read both documents, whether submitting a new or revised application.

C. Ensuring Your Application is Forwarded for Scientific Peer Review

Only compliant and responsive applications received electronically by Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>) before the date and time deadline are peer reviewed for scientific merit. The PI and the AOR should work together to ensure that the application meets these criteria.

1. On-time submission

- See the separate IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp)

- Received and validated by Grants.gov by the date and time listed on the cover of this RFA.

2. Compliance

- Includes the **required** project narrative (see [Part II](#))
- Adheres to **all** formatting requirements (see [Part III](#))
- Adheres to **all** page limit maximums for the project narratives (see [Part II](#)) and appendices (see [Part III](#)). IES will remove any pages above the maximum before forwarding an application for peer review.
- Includes all **required** appendices (see [Part III](#))

3. Responsiveness

- Meets **requirements** for this specific competition (see [Parts II](#) and [Part III](#))

D. Award Limits

Applications **must** conform to the following limits on award duration and cost as shown in the following table.

Applicants should provide a detailed budget justification that explains how the requested costs are allowable, allocable, and reasonable (see 2 CFR 200, Subpart E; <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E>) and reflect the proposed scope of work and the resources needed to complete it. Grant funds may be used to support participation in capacity-building activities, evaluation planning and execution, and sharing evaluation results.

Network	Maximum Number of Awards	Grant Duration	Maximum Grant Award
SPEC-PS	3	3 years	\$1,000,000

E. Requirement for Grantees to Use Persistent Identifiers (PIDs)

In August 2022, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) issued a Memorandum on Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/08-2022-OSTP-Public-Access-Memo.pdf>). This updated open access policy will go into effect by December 31, 2025. In anticipation of these changes and consistent with National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 (NSPM-33; see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/010422-NSPM-33-Implementation-Guidance.pdf>) that establishes policies for federal funding agencies that protect national security while supporting open science, we are requiring that all key personnel for funded projects obtain a PID such as ORCID iD (Open Researcher and Contributor Identification; <https://orcid.org/>) prior to award.

F. Data Sharing Requirement and Public Access to Research

NCEE expects that teams receiving funding through this program will have full access to the data necessary to accomplish the program evaluation objective of this grant program.

NCEE further expects teams receiving funding through this program to disseminate the result of their evaluation activities in a way that is useful to and accessible by learners, educators, parents, policymakers, researchers, and the public (ESRA, § 112.2).

To support accessibility, IES grantees **must** comply with the IES Policy Regarding Public Access to Research (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/researchaccess.asp>) and adhere to other open science practices and SEER

principles (<https://ies.ed.gov/seer/>) where applicable. See Section IV-B-2-A for more information on this and related requirements.

Part II: Competition Requirements and Recommendations

A. Overview and Planned Activities of the Network

1. Competition Purpose

This competition has three purposes:

- First, the program seeks to build the capacity of state higher education agency (or equivalent), college, and university employees to rigorously evaluate postsecondary student success interventions in a manner consistent with IES's What Works Clearinghouse™ evaluation standards.
- Second, as a result of successfully completed grantee evaluations, the program seeks to build high-quality evidence about the effectiveness of postsecondary student success interventions that have been deployed at scale (that is, at more than one Title IV participating institution within or across states).
- Finally, the program seeks to widely share *what* was learned in individual grantee evaluations, so that effective strategies can be scaled by other States and institutional grantees of HEA-authorized programs; and also *how* those evaluations were successfully conducted, so that others may design and execute their own high-quality evaluations of postsecondary student success programs.

Below, we describe the capacity-building activities planned for grantees for each year of the grant as well as the activities we anticipate grantees will complete each year in service of designing and executing their rigorous evaluation. Grantees should include both types of activities in their application narrative and associated budget.

2. Year One (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

The focus of Year One work includes (1) building grantee capacity for high-quality program evaluation, (2) documenting the intervention to be evaluated in Year Two, and (3) planning for evaluation.

In Year One, grantees will be expected to participate in monthly capacity-building workshops with the Network Lead to deepen their understanding of rigorous evaluation research (as defined by IES's What Works Clearinghouse™ standards). Applicants should plan for all members of the evaluation team to participate in capacity-building activities led by the Network Lead. Participation by other team members is at the discretion of the PI.

Grantees should anticipate that each monthly workshop will be 75 minutes in length. We estimate that each may require approximately 75 minutes of “pre-work” prior to each workshop and 75 minutes of planning and follow-up after each workshop.

Separately from those activities—but building upon what has been learned through engagement with the Network Lead and leveraging model resources they provide—grantees will prepare for the rigorous evaluation of their proposed postsecondary student success intervention during the 2026-2027 Academic Year (Year 3).

Applicants may propose either a new or existing postsecondary student success intervention for implementation at scale (see definition in Part II-A-1). Regardless of whether the intervention is new or existing, grantees will be expected to use Year One to document key aspects of their intervention and how it is to be implemented, including:

- A logic model that outlines how components of the intervention work together to generate key outputs that are meant to culminate in improved student outcomes;
- An implementation guide—including key implementation steps, timelines, and artifacts— sufficient to permit others to replicate the intervention in the future;

- A rubric or similar tool to monitor implementation and, as needed, adapt implementation to changing conditions; and
- A description of the resources needed to implement the intervention.

By the end of Year One, grantees will be expected to use an IES-provided template to develop an evaluation plan to rigorously evaluate their intervention. The plan should leverage the capacity-building activities and associated resources provided by the Network Lead, such that, if well-executed, the resulting evaluation would meet IES's What Works Clearinghouse™ standards. To support high-quality evidence building, the Network Lead will provide feedback on the evaluation plan.

3. Year Two (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027)

The focus of Year Two work includes (1) the delivery of the postsecondary student success intervention as outlined in Year One, and (2) the collection of data needed to rigorously evaluate it.

In Year Two, grantees will be expected to implement the intervention at scale at multiple Title IV participating institutions within their state, system, or consortia. At the same time, grantees should be undertaking activities outlined in their evaluation plan from Year One that will support high-quality evidence-building. This may include, but is not limited to: (1) regularly collecting data about the implementation of the intervention and any planned or unplanned variation within or across sites; (2) collecting student-level baseline and administrative data to describe study participants; (3) collecting outcomes data that may describe the extent to which activities are meeting their intended goals; and (4) making plans to collect final outcomes data that will be used to characterize the ultimate impact of the intervention.

Throughout Year Two, grantees will be expected to participate in monthly one-on-one calls with the Network Lead. In each call, the Network Lead and grantee will review the status of the evaluation activity and assist the grantee in addressing emergent questions or concerns. The network Grantees should anticipate that each monthly call will be 60 minutes in length. We estimate that each may require approximately 60 minutes of “pre-work” prior to each call and 30 minutes of subsequent action or follow-up. As needed, the Network Lead will provide up to two small group meetings, each one hour in length, focused on meeting shared grantee challenges.

Grantees will also be expected to develop a Data Sharing and Management Plan (DSMP) as part of their Year Two activities, with the support of the Network Lead. For more information on DSMPs, consult the Implementation Guide for Public Access to Research Data (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/datasharing_implementation.asp) and our FAQs (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/datasharing_faq.asp) for additional DSMP guidance.

4. Year Three (July 1, 2027 – June 30, 2028)

The focus of Year Three work includes (1) the analysis of data collected as part of the evaluation, (2) sharing the findings of the grantee evaluation, and (3) sharing the evaluation approach and relevant “lessons learned” to others in the postsecondary community.

In Year Three, the grantee will be supported by monthly one-on-one calls with the Network Lead for the purposes of helping in analyzing evaluation data and preparing a final evaluation report. Grantees should anticipate that each monthly call will be 75 minutes in length. We estimate that each may require approximately 60 minutes of “pre-work” prior, and 45 minutes of subsequent action or reflection. As needed, the Network Lead will provide up to two small group meetings, each one hour in length, focused on meeting shared grantee challenges.

Separately, grantees will be expected to undertake the analysis and reporting described above. To support high-quality evidence building, both IES and the Network Lead will provide feedback on the analysis and the final evaluation report. All grantees **must** produce a final evaluation report and **must** submit that report to ERIC, the Department’s publicly available repository of education research (see: <https://eric.ed.gov/>).

Finally, grantees will be expected to publicly disseminate (1) their approach to evaluating their postsecondary student success intervention and lessons learned about the process of rigorous program evaluation as well as (2) the findings from their evaluation study and comply with the Data Sharing and Public Access Requirements described in Part I-E above.

B. Research Team Application Requirements

1. Overview

Each Research Team will (1) participate in the capacity-building activities of the Network Lead and (2) leverage the training and technical assistance resources provided by the Network Lead to conduct a rigorous evaluation of their postsecondary student success intervention that meets IES's What Works Clearinghouse™ standards.

To be responsive and forwarded for peer review, the proposed project **must** meet the requirements listed below.

2. Learner Outcomes

Applicants **must** propose to measure postsecondary education outcomes hypothesized to be affected by learner participation in the proposed postsecondary student success intervention. Applicants should use caution to identify outcomes that (1) their intervention can reasonably effect and (2) can be measured in the grant period of performance identified above. Outcomes can include, but are not limited to, measures of:

- Year-to-year retention or persistence in postsecondary education;
- Grade point average, or equivalent;
- Credit accumulation (credit hours earned and attempted including college-level math and English courses);
- Completion of for-credit and non-credit programs that lead to occupational credentials or certificates;
- Completion of certificates, associate, or bachelor's degrees;
- Successful transfer from two-year to four-year institutions and successful post-transfer completion of bachelor's degrees;
- Time to credential; and
- Employment and wages, including in relation to costs and/or debt.

Applicants should plan to generate separate impact estimates for at least one indicator of student participation in HEA programs (e.g., impact on students who are recipients of student loans or grants versus those who are not recipients).

3. Settings

Proposed research **must** be conducted at Title IV participating institutions and **must** include a focus on students participating in programs authorized by the HEA.

4. Interventions

The intervention (that is, the policy, program, or service) that is proposed to be implemented and evaluated **must** be allowable under one or more programs authorized by the HEA.

C. Project Narrative Requirements and Recommendations

You **must** include a Project Narrative with the following sections: (i) Significance of the Proposed Intervention, (ii) Significance of the Proposed Capacity Building, and (iii) Institutional Resources . If any of these sections are missing, or lack the required content described below, your application will not move forward to peer review.

The project narrative **must** adhere to the formatting guidelines (see [Part III.B](#)) and be **no more than 10 pages**. If the narrative exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 10th page of the narrative.

To be responsive to this RFA and forwarded for peer review, the project narrative **must** include the *requirements* listed below.

In addition, the RFA includes recommendations below to improve the quality of your application. We provide recommendations to support (1) applicants in writing proposals and (2) reviewers in evaluating proposals that align with IES's expectations of high-quality evaluation that has scientific merit and practical significance. Reviewers are asked to use these recommendations, in conjunction with their professional judgement and expertise, to evaluate the quality of applications relative to the peer review criteria described in Section IV.D.4

Continues next page.

Section Description or Required or Recommended Elements	Required	Recommended
<u>Significance of the Proposed Intervention Section</u> The purpose of this section is to describe the institutions and students that will be served by your intervention; the intervention you propose to evaluate; and, if shown effective, its potential relevance to similarly situated institutions elsewhere.	X	
You must describe institutional characteristics for each institution at which the intervention is to be deployed and evaluated.	X	
You must describe your proposed intervention, including your rationale for its local use	X	
You must describe the demographic characteristics of students your intervention plans to serve.	X	
Describe students' baseline status on outcome measures relevant to your intervention at each participating institution (e.g., "At Institution X, fall-to-fall persistence rates for first-time beginning students was 55 percent prior to the intervention").		X
If the intervention is new to one or more participating institutions, describe the extent to which current students will be involved in its design, refinement, and execution.		X
Describe why, and to what extent, the intervention may apply to other contexts.		X
Describe how, and to what extent, prior research supports the use of your proposed intervention for the population under investigation.		X
Describe the extent to which your proposed or similar interventions are already used in institutional contexts like those represented by the project team.		X
Describe the other student success interventions already offered to students at participating institutions, how you hypothesize they interact, and how your proposed intervention might further improve outcomes.		X
Describe how the proposed project might contribute to our understanding of how to equitably improve postsecondary student success.		X
Describe how the proposed project might inform the refinement of the proposed intervention.		X

Continues next page.

Section Description or Required or Recommended Elements	Required	Recommended
<u>Significance of the Proposed Capacity Building Section</u> The purpose of this section is to describe your project team and its organization. As a reminder, applicants should plan to have nonoverlapping teams for implementation and evaluation (see Part I-B-3 above).	X	
You must describe the members of your project team and their specific role.	X	
You must describe the extent to which current students are proposed to be involved in activities funded by this grant, including capacity building and evaluation design, execution, and reporting.	X	
You must include letters of agreement from an individual representing each proposed partner agency, institution, or organization in the required Appendix C, Letters of Agreement.	X	
Describe team members' training and experience, including experience working with the proposed study population.		X
Describe how team members' participation in the capacity-building activities provided by the Network Lead will contribute to their individual professional development and the capacity of their home agency/institution to plan and execute rigorous studies of student success interventions.		X
Describe the amount of time team members will commit to proposed activity.		X
Describe how subteams, including one or more implementation and evaluation teams, will collaborate to successfully deliver and independently evaluate your proposed intervention.		X
Describe your plan for how team members will maintain their objectivity and promote transparency in conducting their specific activities. (At a minimum, demonstrate that key personnel who are responsible for the evaluation are not involved in the development or distribution of the intervention.)		X
Describe the extent to which members of the institutional community, beyond current students, have been and may continue to be involved in the design of your proposed intervention and other activities funded by this grant.		X
Describe the management structure and procedures that will be used to keep the project on track and ensure work is of high quality.		X

Section Description or Required or Recommended Elements	Required	Recommended
<u>Institutional Resources Section</u> The purpose of this section is to describe institutions' capacity and access to resources needed to execute a project of this size and complexity and to appropriately disseminate findings.	X	
You must describe the resources agencies/institutions possess to conduct the project.	X	
You must describe your institutional capacity to implement the proposed student success intervention.	X	
You must describe the access you have to student-level data on relevant student outcomes for students who are eligible to be served by the proposed intervention, including both participants and nonparticipants.	X	
Describe your plan for acquiring any resources that are needed to complete your project but are not currently accessible and will require significant expenditures.		X
Describe your access to specific offices or organizations that can support the dissemination of your study findings as described in the required Appendix A, Engagement and Dissemination Plan.		X

Part III: Preparing Your Application

A. Overview

The application contents—individual forms and their PDF attachments—represent the body of an application to IES. Read the IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) to learn how to prepare a complete application that is submitted on time through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov/>).

B. General Formatting

To ensure that reviewers can read your application and that all applicants have similar expectations for length and space, IES specifies the following formatting conventions. Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is necessary so that no applicant will have an unfair advantage by using small type or by providing more text in their applications. These requirements apply to the PDF file as submitted, unless otherwise specified. For an application to be compliant and sent forward for review, the applicant should ensure that each narrative section follows both the page limit maximums and the formatting guidelines below unless otherwise specified.

1. Page and Margin Specifications

For all IES grant applications, a “page” is 8.5 in. x 11 in. on one side only with 1-inch margins at the top, bottom, and both sides.

2. Page Numbering

Add page numbers using the header or footer function and place them at the bottom or upper right corner for ease of reading.

3. Spacing

Text **must** be single spaced.

4. Type Size (Font Size)

Type **must** conform to the following three requirements:

- The height of the letters **must** be at a type size of 12-point or larger.
- Type density, including characters and spaces, **must** be 15 characters per inch (cpi) or fewer. For proportional spacing, the average for any representative section of text **must not** exceed 15 cpi.
- Type size **must** yield no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical inch.

You should check the type size using a standard device for measuring type size, rather than relying on the font selected for a particular word processing/prINTER combination. Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the application; consequently, the use of small type will be grounds for IES to return the application without scientific peer review.

As a practical matter, if you use a 12-point Times New Roman font without compressing, kerning, condensing, or other alterations, and use footnotes sparingly, if at all, the application will typically meet these requirements. Readability should guide your selection of an appropriate font and your use of footnotes.

5. Citations

Use the parenthetical author-date style for citations rather than numeric citations that correspond to the reference list.

6. Graphs, Diagrams, and Tables

Use black and white in graphs, diagrams, tables, and charts. If color is used, check that the material reproduces well if printed or photocopied in black and white.

Text in figures, charts, and tables, including legends, may be in a type size smaller than 12-point but **must** be readily legible.

C. Required and Optional Appendices

The required project narrative (see [Part II: Competition Requirements and Recommendations](#)) is followed by several appendices. Some of these appendices are required, and some are optional. When you submit your application through Grants.gov, you will create a single PDF file that contains the project narrative and all appendices and include it as an attachment in the application package. Include appendices in alphabetical order and simply skip an appendix if it is not required for your application or if you choose not to include one of the optional appendices.

The project narrative and appendices are critical parts of the IES application because they include the substantive content that the peer reviewers will evaluate for theoretical and practical significance and scientific merit.

1. Appendix A: Engagement and Dissemination Plan (Required)

Applicants **must** include Appendix A, Engagement and Dissemination Plan, after the project narrative. Appendix A **must** meet the general formatting guidelines and **be no more** than three pages. If Appendix A exceeds this three-page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 3rd page of the appendix before it is forwarded for scientific peer review.

Your Engagement and Dissemination plan is intended to demonstrate (1) how your proposed evaluation reflects engagement with relevant stakeholders throughout the research process, including in the development of your application; (2) how your proposed approach is grounded in current needs; and (3) how you will, in practical and accessible ways, disseminate findings to relevant stakeholders.

You should describe your plan to engage relevant stakeholders at various junctures in the evaluation and dissemination process. Be sure to identify the specific groups most relevant for your evaluation context, such as learners, educators, policymakers, researchers, parents/caregivers, or other relevant audiences. Your plan should be tailored to those groups who will benefit from the findings and reflect the unique purposes of the project type (see Part III). Engagement and dissemination activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Adapting research goals and procedures to the settings in which the study will be conducted to improve the likelihood of its successful execution.
- Operationalizing key constructs to strengthen and better characterize their internal and external validity.
- Identifying relevant moderating or mediating contexts that may affect implementation, heterogeneity of impacts, or other research findings.
- Gathering feedback on study findings related to their potential interpretations and implications.

- Increasing the likelihood that stakeholders act upon study findings to improve teaching and learning, strengthen education systems, and further contribute to fundamental knowledge and understanding of education and the education sciences.

Describe what guardrails or mechanisms you will put in place to maintain the independence and objectivity of the research and findings while also engaging with stakeholders.

The Engagement and Dissemination Plan is the only information that may be included in Appendix A; all other materials will be removed prior to review of the application.

2. Appendix B: Supplemental Charts, Tables, and Figures (Optional)

Appendix B **must** meet the general formatting guidelines and be **no more than 8 pages**. If Appendix B exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the 8th page of the appendix before it is forwarded for scientific peer review. In Appendix B, you may include figures, charts, or tables with supplementary information like a timeline for your research project, a diagram of the management structure of your project, or examples of measures used to collect data for your project such as individual test items, tests, surveys, and observation and interview protocols.

These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix B; all other material will be removed prior to review of the application.

3. Appendix C: Letters of Agreement (Required)

There is **no recommended page length** for Appendix C.

A letter of agreement from each postsecondary institution participating in the evaluation, demonstrating their willingness to implement the proposed student success intervention and to provide the evaluation team access to student-level data on relevant student outcomes **must** be included in Appendix C. Any other letters of support relevant to this project may be included in Appendix C as well.

Ensure that the letters reproduce well so that reviewers can easily read them. Do not reduce the size of the letters.

Letters of agreement should include enough information to make it clear that the author of the letter understands the nature of the time commitment and timing of participation, as well as any required data, personnel, or other resources that the organization is prepared to contribute to the research project and the ways that organization personnel will be expected to coordinate with the research team if the application is funded. A common reason for projects to fail is loss of participants. 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.

These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix C; all other material will be removed prior to review of the application.

D. Other Narrative Content

In addition to the project narrative (see [Part II: Competition Requirements and Recommendations](#)) and required and optional appendices (see above), you will also prepare a project summary/structured abstract, a bibliography and references cited, an exempt or non-exempt research on human subjects narrative, and biographical sketches for key personnel and consultants to include as file attachments in your application.

1. Project Summary/Structured Abstract

You **must** submit the project summary/structured abstract as a separate PDF attachment in the application package. If your project is recommended for funding, IES will use this abstract as the basis for the online abstracts that we post when new awards are announced. We recommend that the project summary/structured abstract be two-pages long and follow the format used for IES online abstracts (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/>).

(a) Title

- **Title:** Distinct, descriptive title of the project.

(b) Project Summary

The purpose of the project summary is to provide a high-level overview that is accessible to a range of audiences, such as policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. This section should use short, active sentences to briefly describe the significance of the project, project activities, and the intended outcomes.

- **Purpose:** A brief description of the purpose of the project and its significance for improving education in the United States. This should include why the research is important, what this project will do to address the need, and the general expected outcomes of the project.
- **Project Activities:** An overview of the project activities.
- **Products and Dissemination:** A brief description of the expected products of the project, including the products to be developed and the information that will be learned and disseminated.

(c) Structured Abstract

The purpose of the structured abstract is to provide key details about the project activities. This section is most likely to be used by other researchers but should be written in a way that is accessible to anyone who wants more information about the project.

- **Setting:** A brief description of the location where the project activities will take place and other important characteristics of the locale, such as whether it is urban or suburban.
- **Population:** A brief description of the composition of the population in the selected setting to be served.
- **Intervention:** A brief description of the intervention to be studied, including its hypothesized effect on student outcomes.
- **Project Team:** A brief description of the project team, including staff responsible for evaluation and implementation activities.
- **Related IES Projects:** A list of the IES-issued award number and/or corresponding online abstract link (URLs) to completed or ongoing IES-funded projects that are related to the proposed project

2. Bibliography and References Cited

You **must** submit the bibliography and references cited as a separate PDF attachment in the application package. There is **no recommended page length** for the bibliography and references cited. You should include complete citations, including the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), titles of relevant elements such as the article/journal and chapter/book, page numbers, and year of publication for literature cited in the project narrative. As a reminder, you should use the author-date style for citations in the project narrative (see [Part III B.5 Citations](#) for more information).

3. Human Subjects Narrative

You **must** submit an exempt or non-exempt human subjects narrative as a separate PDF attachment in the application package. We do not recommend a page length for the human subjects narrative. See *Information About the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Supported by the Department of Education* (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/fund/guid/humansub/hrsnarrative1.html>) for a brief overview of principles, regulations, and policies which affect research involving human subjects in research activities supported by the Department of Education.

The U.S. Department of Education does not require certification of IRB approval at the time you submit your application. However, if an application that involves non-exempt human subjects research is recommended for funding, the designated U.S. Department of Education official will request that you obtain and send the certification to the Department within 30 days of the formal request from the Department.

4. Biographical Sketches for Key Personnel

You **must** submit a biographical sketch for each person named as key personnel in your application. You may also submit biographical sketches for consultants (optional). Each biographical sketch (an abbreviated CV plus current and pending support information) **must** be no more than five pages in length, and this five-page limit includes current and pending support information. If a biographical sketch exceeds this page limit, IES will remove any pages after the fifth page before it is forwarded for scientific peer review.

Biographical sketches are submitted as separate PDF attachments in the application package. IES **strongly encourages** applicants to use SciENCv (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/>) where you will find an IES biosketch format. After logging in to SciENCv, you will be able to select the IES Biosketch format after selecting the “Create a New Document” option. You can download your IES Biosketch as a Word document to allow you to change the formatting to meet the general IES formatting guidelines. You may also develop your own biosketch format. If you use SciENCv, the information on current and pending support will be entered into the IES biosketch template. If you use your own format, you will need to provide this information in a separate table.

The biographical sketch for the principal investigator, each co-principal investigator, other key personnel, and consultants (if included) should show how members of the project team possess training and expertise commensurate with their specified duties on the proposed project, for example, by describing relevant publications, grants, and research experience, including experience working with the study population as applicable.

Provide a list of current and pending grants for the principal investigator, each co-principal investigator, and other key personnel, along with the proportion of their time, expressed as *percent effort over a 12-month calendar year*, allocated to each project. Include the proposed IES grant as one of the pending grants in this list.

While not required at the time of application, all key personnel must have a persistent identifier (PID), such as an ORCID iD (Open Researcher and Contributor ID; <https://orcid.org/>) at the time of award. For all key personnel who have a PID at the time of application, include the PID in the biosketch and in the “Credential, e.g., agency login” field on the Research and Related Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded) form in the application package. See the IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) for more information about this form in the application package.

If you or any key member of your project team does not yet have a PID, IES encourages you to establish one as soon as possible, given the requirement that all key personnel are required to have a PID in place before an award will be made.

Part IV: Competition Regulations and Review Criteria

A. Funding Mechanisms and Restrictions

1. Mechanism of Support

IES intends to award cooperative agreements pursuant to this Request for Applications. Through the terms of the cooperative agreements, grantees will work with IES to plan and implement their activities.

2. Funding Available

Although IES intends to support activities described in this announcement, all awards pursuant to this Request for Applications are contingent upon the availability of funds and the receipt of meritorious applications. IES makes its awards to the highest quality applications, as determined through scientific peer review.

3. Special Considerations for Budget Expenses

(a) Indirect Cost Rate

Applicants are expected to apply their institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate when developing a budget for the proposed research project.

If your institution does not have an indirect cost rate and you receive a grant from IES, the Indirect Cost Group (ICG) in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of the Chief Financial Officer (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocfo/fipao/faq.html>) can help with obtaining an indirect cost rate once the grant is awarded. Please note that the ICG is not available for assistance during the application preparation process.

Most institutions that do not have a current negotiated rate may use a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (see 2 CFR §200.414: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E/subject-group-ECFRd93f2a98b1f6455/section-200.414> for more information). This de minimis rate may be used indefinitely, and no documentation is required to justify its use.

Institutions, both primary grantees and subawardees, not located in the territorial United States may not charge indirect costs.

(b) Meetings and Conferences

If you are requesting funds to cover expenses for hosting meetings or conferences, please note that there are statutory and regulatory requirements in determining whether costs are reasonable and necessary. Please refer to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance), 2 CFR, §200.432 Conferences (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E/subject-group-ECFRd1f39f9b3d4e72/section-200.432>).

Federal grant funds cannot be used to pay for alcoholic beverages or entertainment, which includes costs for amusement, diversion, and social activities. In general, federal funds may not be used to pay for food. A grantee hosting a meeting or conference may not use grant funds to pay for food for conference attendees unless doing so is necessary to accomplish legitimate meeting or conference business. You may request funds to cover expenses for working meetings, such as working lunches; however, IES will determine whether these costs are allowable in keeping with the Uniform Guidance Cost Principles. Grantees are responsible for the proper use of their grant awards and may have to repay funds to the Department if they violate the rules for meeting- and conference-related expenses or other disallowed expenditures.

4. Program Authority

20 U.S.C. 9561 - 9563 et seq. and Sec. 310 of Division H of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (117 Pub. L. 328). This program is not subject to the intergovernmental review requirements of Executive Order 12372.

5. Applicable Regulations

Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) codified at CFR Part 200. The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 77, 81, 82, 84, 86 (part 86 applies only to institutions of higher education), 97, 98, and 99. In addition 34 CFR part 75 is applicable, except for the provisions in 34 CFR 75.100, 75.101(b), 75.102, 75.103, 75.105, 75.109(a), 75.200, 75.201, 75.209, 75.210, 75.211, 75.217, 75.219, 75.220, 75.221, 75.222, and 75.230.

B. Additional Requirements

1. Pre-Award

(a) Clarification and Budget Questions

IES uses the scientific peer review process as the first step in making funding decisions. If your application is recommended for funding based on the outcome of the scientific peer review, an IES program officer will contact you to clarify any issues that were raised by the peer reviewers and to address whether the proposed budget adequately supports the scope of work and meets federal guidelines. You may be asked for additional detail regarding alignment of your budget, including the participation levels of key and other personnel, to support your proposed analysis and dissemination activities during Year 3. Significant revisions to the project that arise from these information requests will have to be addressed within the original budget.

(b) Demonstrating Access to Data and Education Settings

A letter of agreement from institutions participating in the evaluation demonstrating their willingness to implement the proposed student success intervention and your access to student-level data on relevant student outcomes **must** be included in [Appendix C](#) and an updated letter submitted to IES prior to award.

(c) Assessment of Past Performance

IES considers the applicant's performance and use of funds under a previous federal award as part of the criteria for making a funding decision. IES also determines the principal investigator's (PI's) compliance with the IES Policy Regarding Public Access to Research if they were the PI on previous IES grants awarded in 2012 or later (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/researchaccess.asp>).

(d) Persistent Identifiers (PIDs) for Key Personnel

All key personnel **must** have a persistent identifier (PID), such as ORCID iD (Open Researcher and Contributor Identification; <https://orcid.org/>) in place before an award will be made.

2. Post-Award

(a) Compliance with IES Policy on Public Access to Results

(1) Access to research results: Grantee submissions to ERIC

IES requires all grantees to submit the electronic version of peer-reviewed scholarly publications to ERIC (<https://eric.ed.gov/>), a publicly accessible and searchable electronic database of education research that

makes available full-text documents to the public for free. This public access requirement (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/researchaccess.asp>) applies to peer-reviewed, original scholarly publications that have been supported (in whole or in part) with direct funding from IES. The public access requirement does not apply to book chapters, editorials, reviews, or non-peer-reviewed conference proceedings. As the designated representative for the grantee institution, IES holds the principal investigator (PI) responsible for ensuring that authors of publications stemming from the grant comply with this requirement.

The author's final manuscript is defined as the final version accepted for journal publication and includes all modifications from the peer review process. Submission of accepted manuscripts for public accessibility through ERIC is strongly encouraged as soon as possible but **must** occur within 12 months of the publisher's official date of publication. ERIC will not make the accepted manuscripts available to the public prior to the end of the 12-month embargo period, unless specified by the publisher.

The ERIC website includes a homepage for the Grantee and Online Submission System (<https://eric.ed.gov/submit/>), as well as a Frequently Asked Questions page (<https://eric.ed.gov/?granteefaq>). During the submission process, authors are asked to submit bibliographic information from the publication, including title, authors, publication date, journal title, and associated IES award number(s).

(2) Access to final research data

As described above in Part II-A-3, grantees **must** develop a Data Sharing and Management Plan (DSMP) as part of their Year Two activities, with the support of the Network Lead. The costs of the DSMP can be covered by the grant and should be included in the budget and explained in the budget narrative.

(b) Pre-Register Exploratory and Impact Studies

Grantees **must** register their evaluation plan on a suitable pre-registration platform within the first year of receiving a new award.

There are several options for pre-registration including but not limited to the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies (REES; <https://sreereg.icpsr.umich.edu/sreereg/>), the Open Science Framework (OSF; <https://osf.io/>), ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://clinicaltrials.gov/>), AEA Registry (<https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/>), EGAP (<https://egap.org/content/registration>), Uri Simonsohn's *AsPredicted* (<https://aspredicted.org/>), and trial registries in the WHO Registry Network (<https://www.who.int/ictrp/network/en/>).

The Network Lead will support grantees in pre-registration.

(c) Special Conditions on Grants

For all grants, IES will impose a special condition that states that future grant funding beyond the first year of the project is contingent on IES approval of the evaluation plan.

IES may impose additional special conditions on a grant pertinent to the proper implementation of key aspects of the proposed research design or if the grantee is not financially stable, has a history of unsatisfactory performance, has an unsatisfactory financial or other management system, has not fulfilled the conditions of a prior grant, or is otherwise not responsible.

(d) Attendance at the Annual IES Principal Investigators Meeting

The principal investigator (PI) **must** attend one meeting each year (for up to 3 days) in Washington, DC with other IES grantees and IES staff. The project's budget should include this meeting. PIs who are not able to attend the meeting may designate another person who is key personnel on the research team to attend.

C. Cooperative Agreement Terms

As part of their cooperative agreement with IES, grantees **must** agree to the following:

- Research Teams, including the PI and Co-PIs, **must** participate in all scheduled training, coaching, and technical assistance activities outlined in Part II-A.
- Research Teams **must** use evaluation planning templates and tools provided by the Network Lead.
- Research Teams **must** submit their initial causal impact study/evaluation plan to the Network Lead and IES for review and feedback.
- Research Teams **must** implement and evaluate their student success intervention as described in their Year One implementation and evaluation plans.
- Research Teams **must** participate in and provide content for network-wide dissemination activities. This includes responding to requests from the Network Lead for evaluation findings that will be made available through dissemination products coordinated by Network Lead.
- Research Teams **must** be responsive to occasional inquiries from IES about the status of their projects, their successes, and their challenges.
- Research Teams **must** complete all post-award activities described in Part IV-B-2.

D. Overview of Application and Scientific Peer Review Process

1. Submitting Your Letter of Intent

Letters of intent (LOIs) are submitted online at the IES Peer Review Information Management Online (PRIMO) system (<https://iesreview.ed.gov/LOI/LOISubmit>). **Select the Letter of Intent form for the competition under which you plan to submit your application.** The online submission form contains fields for each of the seven content areas listed below. Use these fields to provide the requested information. The project description should be single-spaced and is recommended to be no more than one page (about 3,500 characters).

The LOI is non-binding and optional but strongly recommended. If you submit an LOI, a program officer will contact you regarding your proposed research. IES staff also use the information in the LOI to identify the expertise needed for the scientific peer review panels and to secure a sufficient number of reviewers to handle the anticipated number of applications.

(a) Elements for the Letter of Intent:

- Descriptive title
- Brief description of the proposed project
- Name, institutional affiliation, address, telephone number, and email address of the principal investigator and any co-principal investigators
- Name and institutional affiliation of any key collaborators and contractors
- Duration of the proposed project (attend to the Duration maximums for each topic and network role)
- Estimated total budget request (attend to the Budget maximums for each topic and network role)

2. Multiple Submissions

You may submit applications to more than one of the FY 2025 research grant programs offered through the Department, including those offered through IES as well as those offered through other offices and programs within the Department. **However, you may submit only one application to the IES grant program announced here.**

If you submit multiple similar applications, IES will determine whether and which applications will be accepted for review and/or will be eligible for funding. In addition, if you submit the same or similar application to IES and to another funding entity within or external to the Department and receive funding for the non-IES application prior to IES scientific peer review of applications, you must withdraw the same or similar application submitted to IES, or IES may otherwise determine you are ineligible to receive an award. If reviews are happening concurrently, IES staff will consult with the other potential funder to determine the degree of overlap and which entity will provide funding if both applications are being considered for funding.

3. Application Processing

Applications **must** be submitted electronically to, and received and validated by, Grants.gov no later than the time and date listed on the cover of this RFA.

Applicants **must** submit their materials using the Grants.gov Workspace (<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/workspace-overview.html>).

You **must** follow the application procedures and submission requirements described in the IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) and on Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants.html>).

After applications are fully uploaded and validated at Grants.gov, the U.S. Department of Education receives the applications for processing and transfer to the IES PRIMO system (<https://iesreview.ed.gov/>). PRIMO allows applicants to track the progress of their application via the Applicant Notification System (ANS).

Approximately one to two weeks after the application deadline, invitation emails are sent to applicants who have never applied to IES before to create their individual PRIMO ANS accounts. Both the PI and the AOR will receive invitation emails.

Approximately four to six weeks after the application deadline, all applicants will begin to receive a series of emails about the status of their application. See the IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) for additional information about ANS and PRIMO.

Once an application has been submitted and the application deadline has passed, you **may not** submit additional materials or information for inclusion with your application.

4. Scientific Peer Review Process

IES will forward all applications that are compliant and responsive to this Request for Applications to be evaluated for scientific and technical merit. Scientific reviews are conducted in accordance with the review criteria stated below and the review procedures posted on the IES website (https://ies.ed.gov/director/sro/application_review.asp) by a panel of experts who have substantive and methodological expertise appropriate to the program of research and Request for Applications.

At least two primary reviewers will complete written evaluations of the application, identifying strengths and weaknesses related to each of the review criteria. Primary reviewers will independently assign a score for each criterion, as well as an overall score, for each application they review. Based on the overall scores assigned by primary reviewers, IES calculates an average overall score for each application and prepares a preliminary rank order of applications before the full peer review panel convenes to complete the review of applications.

The full panel will consider and score only those applications deemed to be the most competitive and to have the highest merit, as reflected by the preliminary rank order. A panel member may nominate for consideration by the full panel any application that they believe merits full panel review but that would not have been included in the full panel meeting based on its preliminary rank order.

5. Review Criteria for Scientific Merit

The purpose of IES-supported research is to help solve education problems by generating reliable information about education programs, practices, policies, and assessments that support learning and improve academic achievement and education access for all learners. IES expects reviewers to assess the scientific rigor and practical significance of the research proposed to judge the likelihood that it will make a meaningful contribution to the larger IES mission. Information about each of these criteria is described in [Part II: Competition Requirements and Recommendations](#).

(1) Significance of the Proposed Intervention

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Significance of the Proposed Intervention section?

(2) Significance of the Proposed Capacity Building

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Significance of the Proposed Capacity Building section? Would participation in the program's activity build significant capacity of individuals and organizations to conduct high-quality program evaluation? Will the principal investigator and other key personnel commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed activities?

(3) Institutional Resources

Does the applicant address the recommendations described in the Institutional Resources section? Does the applicant have the resources required to support the proposed activities? Do the commitments of each partner show support for the implementation and success of the grant?

(4) Engagement and Dissemination

Does the application address the recommendations described in [Appendix A: Engagement and Dissemination Plan](#)? Does the proposed activity reflect engagement with relevant stakeholders throughout the evaluation process? Is the plan to disseminate findings practical and accessible for relevant stakeholders? Is the approach to engagement and dissemination grounded in current needs?

6. Award Decisions

The following will be considered in making award decisions for responsive and compliant applications:

- Scientific merit as determined by scientific peer review
- Performance and use of funds under a previous federal award
- Contribution to the overall program of described in this request for applications
- Ability to carry out the proposed activities within the maximum award and duration requirements
- Availability of funds

Part V: Compliance and Responsiveness Checklist

Only compliant and responsive applications will be forwarded for scientific peer review. Use this checklist to better ensure you have included all required components for compliance and that you have addressed all general and project narrative requirements for responsiveness.

See the IES Application Submission Guide (https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp) for an application checklist that describes the forms in the application package that must be completed and the PDF files that must be attached to the forms for a successful submission through Grants.gov.

Compliance
Have you included a Project Narrative? Does it include all required components?
Do the project narrative and other narrative content adhere to all formatting requirements?
Do the project narrative and other narrative content adhere to all page maximums as described in the RFA? IES will remove any pages above the maximum before forwarding an application for scientific peer review.
Have you included all required appendices?
Responsiveness
Have you met all the General Requirements for an application?
Do you meet the applicant eligibility requirements?
Does your proposed evaluation include at least one measure of learner education outcomes?
Does your Project Narrative include the required sections and the associated requirements?

Part VI: Required Codes for Item 4b of the SF 424 Cover Sheet

Applications to this program are submitted under a single topic. You must enter the appropriate topic and network role code in Item 4b of the SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance form. See the IES Application Submission Guide, https://ies.ed.gov/funding/submission_guide.asp, for more information about this form.

Topic	Code
Strengthening Program Evaluation Capacity	NCEE-SPEC