

Archived Information

Program of Research on Reading Comprehension Grants Information Session, April 22,2002 Questions and Answers

Question: What are the email addresses of the Department of Education contacts for further information regarding this competition?

Answer: Anne.Sweet@ed.gov for Anne Sweet, and Rita.Foy@ed.gov for Rita Foy-Moss.

Question: What is the range of size of the awards for the projects?

Answer: OERI expects to make awards ranging between \$75,000 and \$500,000 for the first 12 months of the awards, with the length of the awards being up to 36 months. Consequently, the proposed budget for an entire project may range up to \$1,500,000 for a 36-month project. The budget amount for any project must be justified in terms of the significance of the project and the resources needed to carry it out. The amount of any award after the first 12 months is contingent upon the availability of funds.

Question: Is a private organization eligible to apply for an award?

Answer: Yes. Private or public organizations, institutions of higher education, regional educational laboratories, institutions, agencies, individuals, or consortia of these entities are all eligible to apply.

Question: Where do these projects need to go through review by an Institutional Review Board?

Answer: These projects should comply with the normal procedures for Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. If a proposed project is covered by the regulations for the protection of human research subjects, it should go through IRB review at the institution(s) that will be engaged in the research project. Further information about what the regulations cover, and what institutions are considered to be “engaged” in research, may be found in the application instructions attached to the ED 424 form, or at the Department of Education’s web page at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCFO/humansub.html>

Question: In the case of a research project proposed by a consortium, who should the official applicant be? Does that applicant have to be a postsecondary institution?

Answer: This decision is up to the members of the consortium, and it does not have to be a postsecondary institution. The Department does require that there be a single entity or individual identified as “the applicant,” who becomes “the grantee” and controls the grant if an award is made for the proposed research. The applicant or potential grantee is identified as the applicant on the ED 424 form, and an individual who is authorized to make financial transactions on behalf of the applicant must sign the ED 424 form as the “authorized representative.” In the case of a consortium, the grantee is responsible for arranging financial relationships with the other consortium members.

Question: Are there any requirements regarding who should be named as the “project director”? Must the project director be affiliated with the applicant? Must the project director be the person who is in direct control of the grant financial transactions?

Answer: The project director is the person who has overall responsibility for managing and leading the research project activities for which the grant award is given. Depending on the particular project, the project director does not necessarily have to be employed at the grant institution. The project director should possess the professional, organizational, and personal qualifications and authority necessary for carrying out these management and leadership responsibilities. It should be noted that the applicant/grantee is the legal owner of the grant award. If the project director leaves the grantee’s institution, the grant would not necessarily transfer to his or her new institutional affiliation unless the grantee and OERI also agreed to the transfer. It should also be noted that the project director is considered one of the “key personnel” of the grant activity, and that any changes in key personnel must be approved by OERI.

Question: Must the project director be the principal investigator?

Answer: For projects that do not require a complicated management structure (such as a Center), the principal investigator is usually the project director. For these less complicated grants, the principal investigator generally provides the intellectual leadership for the project, and retains budget and personnel authority to ensure the scientific integrity of the project. However, the project director does not necessarily have to be the principal investigator. Others may be identified as principal investigator(s) based on their involvement in the proposed project, but the project director’s ability to carry out his or her responsibilities to ensure the overall integrity of the research activities depends on the quality of his or her relationship with the principal investigator(s).

Question: Will there be any meetings of grant researchers at which attendance is required, and should they include funds to support travel to these meetings?

Answer: No meetings of grant researchers are required. OERI may sponsor meetings in the future to which grant researchers are invited, but attendance will not be mandatory. OERI does expect researchers to attend appropriate national research conferences to share information about their work with the research community. Including funds to support such activity in the grant proposal’s budget is appropriate.

Question: May proposed research projects focus on the educational needs of special populations and instructional interventions that are designed to serve these needs more effectively?

Answer: Yes. Applicants are encouraged to provide a rationale for focusing their proposed project on any particular population(s) and research issues to be studied.

Question: Are there any age limits to the population(s) that may be studied under this program?

Answer: No. Applicants may propose to study populations of any age, including early childhood and postsecondary populations. Applicants should provide a compelling rationale for the age or grade of the population to be studied.

Question: How is the term “reading comprehension” to be understood for the purposes of this program?

Answer: Reading comprehension is understood in the context of the published scientific literature. The understanding of reading comprehension used in proposed research projects should be supported by scientific theory and relevant empirical data. Applicants may wish to consult the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) and the RAND Reading Study Group Report (2001).

Question: Is this program oriented toward any particular theory of reading comprehension?

Answer: No. The program is interested in any research project that will generate research data that informs theory about reading comprehension. Applicants are encouraged to identify existing research evidence that supports whatever theory is to be investigated, and to explain how the proposed research will further the research community’s ability to evaluate that theory’s merits. For example, a research project could be designed to test predictions based on a given theory, or to pit alternative predictions of different theories against one another.

Question: If the ultimate objective is to change and improve educational practices, what is the value of developing a theory with data drawn from current practices?

Answer: The ultimate objective of this program is to improve educational practices, and innovative approaches are often highly regarded by peer reviewers. At the same time, it is important to use grounded theory and empirical data gathered about existing practices to build a foundation of knowledge that allows for testing innovations in a variety of ways. Research should contribute to explanations of how and why a specific innovation works; for whom it works; and under what circumstances it works, including such variables as instructional setting.

Question: For the purposes of this program, would it be better to propose research involving interventions studied under tightly controlled “laboratory conditions,” or to propose research studying reading comprehension in situations resembling “ordinary classroom” contexts?

Answer: A range of research proposals is expected and encouraged. Proposed research may be either educationally relevant basic research under carefully controlled conditions, or applied research designed to test causal hypotheses about the mechanisms of successful reading comprehension in important educational settings. For those projects proposing basic research of some kind, applicants are encouraged to include an explanation of the educational significance of the proposed research study.