

EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER GRANTS

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INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/applicant.html>

LETTER OF INTENT RECEIPT DATE: September 17, 2004

APPLICATION RECEIPT DATE: November 18, 2004

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1. REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

The Institute of Education Sciences (Institute) invites applications that will contribute to its Education Research and Development Center program. For this competition, the Institute will consider only applications that meet the requirements outlined below under the section on Requirements of the Proposed Center.

2. PURPOSE OF THE CENTER PROGRAM

The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 requires that the Institute support not less than eight national research and development centers (centers), with each center covering not less than one of 11 topics of research listed in the statute (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/rschstat/leg/PL107-279.pdf>). The Administration's budget proposal to Congress for the Institute for the 2005 fiscal year provides funds both to continue a number of existing centers and to award new centers. In this context, the Institute intends for the new centers to contribute significantly to the solution of education problems in the United States by developing, testing, and disseminating new approaches to improve teaching and learning, and ultimately, student achievement. Each of the centers will conduct a focused program of education research in its topic area. In addition, each center will conduct supplemental research within its broad topic area, and will work cooperatively with the Institute to disseminate rigorous evidence and information to educators and policy-makers as well as to provide national leadership in defining research and development directions within its topic area. The mission of the centers is to contribute to the production and dissemination of new knowledge and products that provide practical solutions to important education problems in the United States.

For the 2005 Center competition, the Institute invites applications for four National Education Research and Development Centers: (1) National Research and Development Center on Assessment, Standards, and Accountability; (2) National Research and Development Center on State and Local Education Policy; (3) National Research and Development Center on Early Childhood Development and Education; and (4) National Research and Development Center on English Language Learners. The Institute will fund no more than one center in each of these topic areas. In all of its activities, the Institute is committed to funding only high quality work. Hence, the Institute will make an award for a particular center only if at least one application for that center is deemed meritorious under peer review. In addition, applicants should note that the Institute will use a *cooperative agreement* mechanism that allows substantial Federal involvement in the activities undertaken with Federal financial support. The Institute intends to work cooperatively with grantees on the supplementary research projects, dissemination activities, and leadership activities as described below. The specific responsibilities of the Federal staff and project staff will be identified and agreed upon prior to the award.

3. BACKGROUND

The mission of the Institute includes developing and evaluating the effectiveness of programs, strategies, and products that are intended to increase student learning and achievement, and ensuring that information on what works and how to implement it is used by education practitioners and policy makers. One of the ways in which the Institute fulfills its mission is through its National Education Research and Development Centers.

The Institute's research and development center program is different from the Institute's topical grant programs in the following ways: (1) Topical research grants, such as those in Teacher Quality or Mathematics and Science Education (for information on these and other programs, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/applicant.html>), are to carry out a single program of research; whereas centers carry out both a single program of research as well as a variety of smaller scale supplemental projects that address unmet research needs within the center's broad topic area. (2) Topical research grants do not involve significant responsibility for disseminating

findings to practitioners and for providing national leadership in the research field; in contrast these tasks are central to centers. (3) Topical research grants typically have shorter durations and involve lower levels of funding than centers.

National Research and Development Centers

For its 2005 center competition, the Institute is interested in applications that offer the greatest promise in (1) contributing to the solution of a specific education problem within the center topics described below; (2) providing relatively rapid research and scholarship on supplemental questions that emerge within the center's topic area and that are not being addressed adequately elsewhere; (3) providing outreach and dissemination of findings of the Center, of the What Works Clearinghouse, and of other rigorous research studies and research syntheses on the center's topic to practitioners, policy makers, and technical assistance providers (e.g., comprehensive centers); and (4) providing national leadership within the center's topic by developing position papers, hosting meetings, and engaging in dialogue with researchers and practitioners in order to identify promising areas of research, development, and dissemination for the field.

4. REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPOSED CENTER

For the 2005 center competition, applicants should submit *either* under Goal One (National Research and Development Center on Assessment, Standards, and Accountability) *or* Goal Two (National Research and Development Center on State and Local Education Policy) *or* Goal Three (National Research and Development Center on Early Childhood Development and Education) *or* Goal Four (National Research and Development Center on English Language Learners). Applicants should indicate the goal under which they are applying in the title of the proposal (e.g., Goal One: National Research and Development Center on Assessment, Standards, and Accountability) and on the application form.

Applications under Goal One (Assessment, Standards, and Accountability). Under Goal One, the Institute invites applications that focus on assessment, standards, and/or accountability in education. Assessment, standards, and accountability cover a broad spectrum of education issues and problems. The Institute intends to fund a center under Goal One that plans and carries out a focused program of work that is designed to provide answers to specific practical questions within education assessment, standards, and accountability. Examples of appropriate topics are listed below. Applicants are free to propose a focus other than those in the following examples.

- (1) *Determining adequate yearly progress.* There are a variety of methods States could use for identifying schools needing improvement. States might, for example, consider students' gain scores on state assessments alone or in conjunction with indicators such as graduation rates and attendance rates. States might select assessments that test broadly and capture well performance across the range from low to high achievement or for example, select assessments that make finer distinctions at the lower end than at the upper end. What are the consequences for choosing one approach over another? For the National Research and Development Center on Assessment, Standards and Accountability, an applicant might propose a focused program of research to examine alternative methods for determining adequate yearly progress and to identify the consequences of choosing one approach over others by using existing state databases.

Such work would be designed to improve the effectiveness of current models of accountability and to help design constructive options for state education agencies.

- (2) *Linking classroom-based assessment with end-of-year assessments.* End-of-year testing carried out under State accountability systems can inform instruction, management, and allocation of resources at broad levels. The positive effects of standards and accountability systems on student performance could likely be enhanced substantially if assessment were driven into the classroom in the form of periodic low-stakes opportunities to assess individual children in order to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses and help teachers individualize instruction. The Institute is interested in proposals that include a focused program of research to develop and test classroom-based assessments for instructional purposes (e.g., assessments tied to individualized instructional materials) that are linked to end-of-year accountability assessments. Because many teachers will not be familiar with classroom-based assessment approaches, applicants with proposals in this category should consider what professional development is needed for teachers to incorporate systematic use of assessments to inform instruction (e.g., how this differs from simplistic notions of "teaching to the test").

Applications under Goal Two (State and Local Education Policy). Under Goal Two, the Institute invites applications that propose a focused program of research in education policy that will contribute to answering significant education policy questions. Education policy covers a broad spectrum of issues. The Institute intends to fund a center under Goal Two that plans and carries out a focused program of work that is designed to provide answers to specific practical questions within education policy. Examples of appropriate topics are listed below. Applicants are free to propose a focus other than those in the following examples.

- (1) *Education finance policies.* As researchers continue to debate the relation between school expenditures and student achievement, policymakers responsible for establishing state and local education funding policies and for creating systems that will support student achievement need better information on the implications of different strategies for distributing support across districts and schools. The Institute is interested in Center proposals in which investigators collaborate with a state to compare the effects of implementing contrasting models for distributing state education funds across districts on student achievement and relevant mediators of student achievement (e.g., indices of teacher quality, availability of advanced academic courses in high schools, quality of instruction) and/or contrasting models for distributing local education funds across schools within a district.
- (2) *Local education management policies.* At the local level, decision makers implement a variety of approaches for improving the quality of the learning environment and increasing student achievement. For example, some districts employ interventions that target low-achieving schools. Others may adopt an approach for aligning curriculum and instruction with district goals and standards. Still others may adopt some form of data driven management. The Institute is interested in applications including a focused program of research to compare the effects of implementing contrasting approaches to

improving the quality of the learning environment among schools within a district and thereby increasing student achievement.

Applications under Goal Three (Early Childhood Development and Education). Under Goal Three, the Institute invites applications that propose a focused program of research that will contribute to the solution of significant problems in early childhood education. Examples of appropriate topics for improving early childhood education are listed below. Applicants are free to propose a focus other than those in the following examples. However, applicants should not propose research that duplicates the intent of the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research program, which is to evaluate different early childhood curricula (for information on the Preschool Curriculum program, please see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/awards.html#preschool>).

- (1) *Professional development for teachers without postsecondary degrees in early childhood.* Substantial proportions of early childhood educators and caregivers do not have postsecondary degrees in early childhood education or a closely related field. For example, according to the Head Start FACES 2000 data, 42 percent of Head Start lead teachers have not completed either an associate's or bachelor's degree (Zill, et al., 2003). The Institute is interested in proposals to develop and test models of professional development for early childhood teachers who have little or no postsecondary training. Applicants should address both the content of the professional development and the delivery of such content. What would comprise an effective delivery mechanism for a workforce that receives low wages and has little free time to devote to professional development and yet is expected to help prepare young children for learning in school? Center proposals in this category must be broader than what would be funded under the Institute's current Teacher Quality Education Research Grants program (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/applicant.html>) in which applicants could propose to evaluate the effectiveness of a single approach to professional development. The Institute expects center proposals, for example, to compare the effects of different theoretically-based approaches to preparing early childhood educators.
- (2) *Comparisons of different models for coordinating early childhood programs.* For a variety of reasons (e.g., to increase availability of full-day, year round child care for low-income working parents; to improve quality of early education for young children from low-income families), the number of early childhood education and care partnerships has grown in the past 10 to 15 years (Schilder, Kiron, & Elliott, 2003). In many instances, state policies and practices have been enacted and implemented to further coordination of early childhood programs. The Institute is interested in proposals done in collaboration with a state to evaluate different models for the coordination of early childhood care and education programs. For example, an applicant might propose that a major study of its focused program of research be an evaluation using an experimental design in which one of two or more models for or levels of coordinating programs is assigned to each participating region. The outcomes of interest would at least include child assessments of school readiness; numbers of children and families served; number, type, and quality of services; and costs. In addition, the applicant would collect data on the implementation process. The ultimate goal of such research would be to inform policy makers' and

practitioners' decisions regarding the benefits and costs of different models for coordinating early childhood programs.

Applications under Goal Four (English Language Learners). Under Goal Four, the Institute invites applications that propose a focused program of research designed to provide solutions to specific challenges in the education of English language learners. The Institute recognizes that there is great diversity among English language learners in the United States. The educational challenges of English language learners who enter the U.S. school system in kindergarten or first grade are very different from the challenges of those who enter in middle school or high school. Strategies that schools may effectively and efficiently adopt when they have large proportions of English language learners whose home language is the same (e.g., Spanish-speaking students in a school in the Southwest) are likely to be very different from strategies that are available and practical for helping students whose home language is so infrequently represented in schools that there may be no support in the student's home language available at school. Given this diversity and the problem/solution focus of the Centers, the Institute encourages applicants to identify one or more problems relevant to a specific aspect of educating English language learners, rather than to try to address all issues relevant to English language learners. The goal is to identify specific problems, develop and evaluate strategies for solving those problems, and to provide educators and policy makers with comparisons of the outcomes and costs resulting from implementation of these strategies. Applicants should be cognizant of work currently funded by the Institute and not propose projects that would duplicate these efforts (see descriptions of new and planned evaluation projects <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/resources/studyplans.html>; for descriptions of research projects, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/awards.html#literacy>). Examples of appropriate topics are listed below. Applicants are free to propose a focus other than those in the following examples.

- (1) *Interventions to improve English reading skills.* In this category, the Institute is interested in proposals that develop and rigorously evaluate the impact of contrasting approaches to teaching English language learners English reading skills. There is need in this area for rigorous evaluations of the efficacy and effectiveness of such interventions for both younger and older students.
- (2) *Assessment of English language learners.* In this category the Institute is interested in applications for centers that would focus on the development and testing of new assessments or adaptation of existing assessments that would be reliable and valid measures of English language learners' knowledge of English and their knowledge and skill in reading English. Such assessments would provide a foundation for researchers to develop, and for teachers to implement, interventions that target specific knowledge and skills.

Requirements applying to all center proposals

Justification of the center focus. For all goals, applicants must first specify the goal to which they are applying and the specific focus of the center. Under Goal One, for example, applicants might propose that the National Education Research and Development Center on Assessment,

Standards, and Accountability focus on developing an empirical process for validating the content of academic standards and providing education decision makers with evidence on the implications of adopting different approaches to setting standards.

Second, applicants must provide a compelling rationale for having the center focus on the selected education problem and approach to problem solution. Applicants should articulate the *practical* importance of the approach. The critical issues are (a) whether the approach or strategy is likely to improve the learning environment in ways that will produce educationally meaningful effects on outcomes that are important to educational achievement (e.g., grades, achievement test scores, school readiness) and, therefore, are of interest to parents, teachers, and education decision makers and (b) how significant the problem is in the context of competing problems for which education practitioners and decision makers need education researchers to provide solutions. For example, under Goal Four, applicants might propose to develop and evaluate instructional approaches that will be sufficiently comprehensive and intensive to enable English language learners entering high school who are literate in their home language to graduate from high school with the necessary skills to successfully transition to college. Such applicants would need to provide a compelling rationale for their proposed interventions (e.g., what is the theoretical foundation for the proposed intervention; what empirical evidence or pilot data suggest that the proposed intervention would improve student learning if used). In this example, to address the *practical* importance of the proposed intervention, applicants might present an argument that the proposed intervention is sufficiently comprehensive so that students completing the intervention are likely to have gained the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college level courses, that the proposed interventions are cost-effective means for achieving this goal, and that the need for such interventions is great given the numbers of students in this group who do or do not successfully enter and complete college.

In addition to addressing the practical importance of the strategy, the applicant should describe (a) any empirical evidence that suggests that the approach is likely to be effective and (b) any evidence that rigorous evaluation of the approach will have policy implications because, for example, districts have begun to adopt this practice.

Focused program of research. The most important consideration in the competitive review of proposals will be the applicant's articulation of the focused program of research and development, including well-specified goals, a detailed research methods and data analysis plan, a timetable for accomplishing the research, and the specific outcomes of the program of research. The Institute is most interested in projects that will provide rigorous evidence of the effectiveness of strategies intended to solve specific education problems, and particularly the *relative effectiveness and costs of contrasting approaches to problem solution.*

When the proposed focused program of research and development has the goal of producing or identifying products or approaches that have effects on student or teacher outcomes, random assignment or regression-discontinuity designs are strongly preferred. Applicants proposing to use other approaches, such as well-designed quasi-experiments with matched groups and statistical controls, or correlational studies of large databases should provide a compelling rationale for why random assignment is impossible or inappropriate and should carefully justify

their approach in terms of the ability to advance knowledge of what works and what does not, for whom, under what circumstances.

A well-designed quasi-experiment is one that reduces substantially the potential influence of selection bias on membership in the intervention or comparison group. This involves demonstrating equivalence between the intervention and comparison groups at program entry on the variables that are to be measured as program outcomes (e.g., math achievement test scores), or obtaining such equivalence through statistical procedures such as propensity score balancing or regression. It also involves demonstrating equivalence or removing statistically the effects of other variables on which the groups may differ and that may affect intended outcomes of the program being evaluated (e.g., demographic variables, experience and level of training of teachers, motivation of parents or students). Finally, it involves a design for the initial selection of the intervention and comparison groups that minimizes selection bias or allows it to be modeled.

Well-designed correlational analyses involve large longitudinal databases that include information on growth over time in the skills and knowledge of individual students as connected to their educational experiences. Although even the most sophisticated of such analyses on the most detailed of datasets cannot support strong causal conclusions in terms of what works, appropriately designed analyses of the appropriate data can often test and discard certain models of causal effects as unlikely. If the results of such analyses are to reduce the need to conduct expensive field trials of interventions that are unlikely to be effective, they would be a worthwhile investment.

Observational, survey, or qualitative methodologies are encouraged as a complement to experimental methodologies to assist in the identification of factors that may explain the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the intervention. Proposals should provide research designs that permit the identification and assessment of factors impacting the fidelity of implementation.

Although student outcome data would be ideal, the Institute recognizes that in some cases, improvement in student achievement scores will accrue slowly as a result of systemic changes (e.g., incentives for hiring high quality teachers may slowly change the quality of instruction offered at the school and through that change, improve the overall student achievement level). In such cases, researchers should propose to measure mediators or proximal outcomes (e.g., instructional practice) known to predict student achievement and provide a cogent rationale detailing the hypothesized relation among the systemic strategy, the proximal outcome(s), and student achievement. Mediating and moderating variables that are measured in the intervention condition that are also likely to affect outcomes in the comparison condition should be measured in the comparison condition (e.g., teacher turnover rate, teacher experience/time in position).

Along with the description of the focused program of research, applicants should include a clear timeline for the activities in their focused program of research. Note, if the applicant is developing new interventions, it is reasonable for the applicant to conduct small preliminary studies (e.g., a short-term pre-test/post-test study with a reasonable comparison group) to obtain preliminary evidence that the intervention as it is being developed is likely to work or evidence that aspects of the intervention need modification prior to conducting a test of efficacy.

However, by the end of the project period, applicants are expected to have completed one or more tests of the efficacy of the intervention they have developed. Ideally, tests of the effectiveness of the scaled-up intervention would also be conducted.

Whatever strategies or programs the center evaluates, the center should include an analysis of the cost of implementing the programs.

Competitive applicants will have research teams that collectively demonstrate expertise in the education practice being examined, implementation and analysis of results from the research design that will be employed, and working with education delivery settings.

When the plans for the first year of grant activities include work to be conducted in schools or other education delivery settings, applicants are required to document the availability and cooperation of the schools or other education delivery settings that will be required to carry out that work via a letter of support from the education organization(s). When work in education settings is not planned until the second year of the grant or after an appreciable period of start-up activities and arrangements with research sites are to be developed during that start-up period, applicants are required to document that they have the capacity and experience to obtain such cooperation and to describe the steps they will take to obtain it.

Supplementary studies. As part of their program of research, applicants are expected to propose smaller research projects that speak to other issues that are important within the context of the broad topic of the center. For example, under education for English language learners, applicants might propose a focused program of research on instructional practices to support English language learners who are children of migrant workers. They might also propose a smaller study to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of culturally sensitive approaches to fostering mutually supportive relationships with culturally and/or linguistically diverse families and, for example, providing migrant parents with the knowledge and skills to facilitate their child's transitions in and out of new schools. The Institute intends to work cooperatively with center grantees to select and design supplementary studies as needed to respond to pressing policy and practice needs within the topic covered by the center. In that context, the Institute does not expect applicants to provide highly detailed research plans for these studies. It is sufficient to provide two or three examples of supplementary studies the applicant believes might be useful to undertake, including a short rationale explaining the need for the proposed study and a short description of the type of research approach that would be used.

Dissemination. As part of the center activities, applicants are expected to develop new products (e.g., manuals, guides, booklets, and other materials for the purpose of dissemination to practitioner and policy audiences) and to engage in dissemination and outreach activities. Through the cooperative agreement, the Institute intends to work with center grantees to develop and plan these activities. Consequently, the Institute does not expect applicants to provide highly detailed plans for these activities. It is sufficient to provide two or three examples of the types of activities the applicant believes might be useful to undertake, including a short rationale justifying the need for the proposed activity and a description of the applicant's capacity for conducting such projects (e.g., experience developing manuals and guides for practitioners).

Leadership. As part of the center activities, applicants are expected to provide national leadership within the center's topic area by developing position papers, hosting meetings, and engaging in dialogue with researchers and practitioners in order to identify promising areas of research, development, and dissemination for the field. The Institute intends to work cooperatively with center grantees in the development and planning of such activities. In that context, the Institute does not expect applicants to provide highly detailed plans for the leadership activities. It is sufficient to provide two or three examples of the types of activities the applicant believes might be useful to undertake, including a short rationale justifying the need for the proposed activity and a description of the applicant's capacity for conducting such projects.

5. APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Application forms and instructions for the electronic submission of applications will be available for this program of research no later than September 29, 2004, from the following web site:

<https://ies.constellagroup.com>

6. MECHANISM OF SUPPORT

The Institute intends to award center grants in the form of cooperative agreements for periods up to 5 years pursuant to this request for applications.

7. FUNDING AVAILABLE

Typical awards will be in the range of \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 (total cost) per year for 5 years. The size of the award depends on the scope of the activities.

The Institute expects the budget for supplementary studies, dissemination activities, leadership activities and any administrative activities not included in the focused program of research to be no less 15 percent and no more than 40 percent of the total direct cost per year with the remainder of the resources allocated to the focused program of research.

Although the plans of the Institute include the education research and development center program, awards pursuant to this request for applications are contingent upon the availability of funds and the receipt of a sufficient number of meritorious applications. The Institute will fund only one center under each goal. However, because the Institute is committed to funding only high quality work, the Institute will make an award for a particular center only if at least one application for that center is deemed meritorious under peer review.

8. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applicants that have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research are eligible to apply. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, non-profit and for-profit organizations and public and private agencies and institutions, such as colleges and universities.

9. SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

Activities supported through this program must be relevant to U.S. schools. Recipients of awards are expected to publish or otherwise make publicly available the results of the work supported through this program.

Applicants should budget for a two-day kick-off meeting in Washington, DC, with other grantees and Institute staff, in the fall of 2005. Key center personnel are expected to describe plans and timelines for activities for the center. In addition to the kick-off meeting, towards the end of Year 1 and each subsequent year, grantees will meet with other grantees and Institute staff for a two-day meeting, during which key center personnel will report on the progress and activities of the center.

Prior to the annual meeting, grantees will submit a report describing accomplishments and activities, and explaining any deviations from the proposed plans and timeline for the relevant year. Through the terms of the cooperative agreement, grantees will work with the Institute to plan activities related to (a) supplementary research; (b) dissemination and outreach (including development of specific products, such as manuals, booklets, and guides); and (c) leadership in the field (see description in Section 4: Requirements of the Proposed Center).

The Institute anticipates that the majority of the research will be conducted in field settings and many of the other activities will be conducted off-campus. Hence, the applicant is reminded to apply its negotiated off-campus indirect cost rate, as directed by the terms of the applicant's negotiated agreement.

Research applicants may collaborate with for-profit entities that develop, distribute, or otherwise market products or services that can be used as interventions or components of interventions in the proposed research activities. Involvement of the developer or distributor must not jeopardize the objectivity of the evaluation. Applications from or collaborations including such organizations should justify the need for Federal assistance to undertake the evaluation of programs that are marketed to consumers and consider cost-sharing part of the cost of the evaluation.

10. LETTER OF INTENT

A letter indicating a potential applicant's intent to submit an application is optional, but encouraged, for each application. The letter of intent must be submitted electronically by the date listed at the beginning of this document, using the instructions provided at the following web site:

<https://ies.constellagroup.com>

The letter of intent should include a descriptive title, the goal which the application will address, and brief description of the proposed focused program of research (no longer than one page, single-spaced, using a 12 point font without compression or kerning); the name, institutional affiliation, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the principal investigator(s); and the name and institutional affiliation of any key collaborators. The letter of intent should indicate the duration of the proposed project and provide an estimated budget request by year, and a total budget request. Although the letter of intent is optional, is not binding, and does not enter into the review of subsequent applications, the information that it contains allows Institute staff to estimate the potential workload to plan the review.

11. SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

Applications must be submitted **electronically by 8:00 p.m. Eastern time** on the application receipt date, using the ED standard forms and the instructions provided at the following web site:

<https://ies.constellagroup.com>

Application forms and instructions for the electronic submission of applications will be available for this program of research no later than September 29, 2004. Potential applicants should check this site for information about the electronic submission procedures that must be followed and the software that will be required.

The application form approved for this program is OMB Number 1890-0009.

12. CONTENTS AND PAGE LIMITS OF APPLICATION

All applications and proposals for Institute funding must be self-contained within specified page limitations. Internet Web site addresses (URLs) may not be used to provide information necessary to the review because reviewers are under no obligation to view the Internet sites.

Sections described below, and summarized in Table 1, represent the body of a proposal submitted to the Institute and should be organized in the order listed below. Sections *a* (ED 424) through *h* (Budget Justification) are required parts of the proposal. Section *i* (Appendix A) is optional unless the applicant is required to submit letters of cooperation from schools because the applicant intends to conduct field research during the first year of the grant. In such cases, letters of cooperation must be included in Appendix A. Section *j* (Appendix B) is optional. All sections must be submitted electronically.

Observe the page number limitations given in Table 1.

Table 1

| Section | Page Limit | Additional Information |
|---|-------------------|---|
| a. Application for Federal Education Assistance (ED 424) | n/a | |
| b. Budget Information Non-Construction Programs (ED 524) – Sections A and B | n/a | |
| c. Budget Information Non-Construction Programs (ED 524) – Section C | n/a | |
| d. Project Abstract | 1 | |
| e. Research Narrative | 30 | Figures, charts, tables, and diagrams may be included in Appendix A |
| f. Reference List | no limit | Complete citations, including titles and all authors |
| g. Curriculum Vita of Key Personnel | 3 | No more than 3 pages for each key person |
| h. Budget Justification | no limit | |
| i. Appendix A | 15 | |
| j. Appendix B | 10 | |

- a. *Application for Federal Education Assistance (ED 424)*. The form and instructions are available on the website.
- b. *Budget Information Non-Construction Programs (ED 524)—Sections A and B*. The application must include a budget for each year of support requested and a cumulative budget for the full term of requested Institute support. Applicants must provide budget information for each project year using the ED 524 form (a link to the form is provided on the application website at <http://ies.constellagroup.com>). ED 524 form has three sections: A, B, and C. Instructions for Sections A and B are included on the form.
- c. *Budget Information Non-Construction Programs (ED 524)—Section C*. Instructions for ED 524 Section C are as follows. Section C must provide an itemized budget breakdown for each project year, for each budget category listed in Sections A and B. For personnel, include a listing of percent effort for each project year, as well as the cost. Section C should also include a breakdown of the fees to consultants, a listing of each piece of equipment, itemization of supplies into separate categories, and itemization of travel requests (e.g. travel for data collection, conference travel, etc.) into separate categories. Any other expenses should be itemized by category and unit cost.
- d. *Proposal abstract*. The abstract is limited to one page and must include: (1) The title of the project; (2) the RFA goal under which the applicant is applying; and brief descriptions of (3) the potential contribution the proposed center will make to the solution of an education problem; and (4) the focused program of research that the proposed center would conduct.
- e. *Center program narrative*. Incorporating the requirements outlined under the section on Requirements of the Proposed Center, the *center program narrative* provides the majority of the information on which reviewers will evaluate the proposal and should include the following sections (1 through 7) in the order listed:
 - (1) Justification of the Center Focus (suggested: 2-3 pages)

Identify the education problem that will be addressed by the study; specify the strategy or strategies that will be developed and evaluated to address the identified problems and that will be the focus of the center; and describe the contribution the center will make to a solution to the identified education problem. Provide a compelling rationale justifying the need for having the center address this particular approach to solving the identified education problem, giving attention to the practical importance of the approach or strategy, any empirical evidence suggesting that the approach is likely to be effective, and any evidence that rigorous evaluation of the proposed approach will have policy implications.
 - (2) Focused Program of Research (suggested: 15-18 pages)

Provide a clear and detailed explanation of the focused program of research, including well-specified goals, detailed research methods and data analysis plans, a timetable for accomplishing the research, and the specific outcomes of the focused program of research.

For projects in which an intervention or strategy is proposed, include a description of the intervention along with the conceptual rationale and empirical evidence supporting the intervention. (Applicants proposing an intervention may use Appendix B to include up to 10 pages of examples of curriculum material, computer screens, or further description of the intervention.)

In the description of the research and evaluation studies, applications must (a) include clear, concise hypotheses or research questions; (b) present a clear description of, and a rationale for, the sample or study participants, including justification for exclusion and inclusion criteria and, where groups or conditions are involved, strategies for assigning participants to groups; (c) provide clear descriptions of, and rationales for, data collection procedures and measures to be used; and (d) present a detailed data analysis plan that justifies and explains the selected analytic strategy, shows clearly how the measures and analyses relate to the hypotheses or research questions, and indicates how the results will be interpreted. Quantitative studies should, where sufficient information is available, include a power analysis to provide some assurance that the sample is of sufficient size.

- (3) Supplementary Studies (suggested 2-3 pages)
Provide short descriptions of two or three examples of supplementary studies, including a short rationale explaining the need for each proposed study and a short description of the type of research approach that would be used.
- (4) Dissemination Activities (suggested 2-3 pages)
Provide short descriptions of two or three examples of dissemination activities, including a short rationale justifying the need for each proposed activity and a short description of the applicant's capacity for conducting such projects (e.g., experience developing materials for practitioners, designing websites).
- (5) Leadership Activities (suggested 2-3 pages)
Provide short descriptions of two or three examples of leadership activities, including a short rationale justifying the need for each proposed activity and a short description of the applicant's capacity for conducting such projects (e.g., experience organizing small conferences).
- (6) Management and Institutional Commitment:(suggested: 2-3 pages)
Describe plans and procedures for the overall management of the center. These plans should include details of procedures for coordinating with schools and districts or other education delivery settings involved in the projects of the center. Provide a description of the resources available to support the center at the applicant's institution and in the field settings in which the research will be conducted.
- (7) Personnel (suggested: 2-3 pages)
Include brief descriptions of the qualifications of key personnel, including their proposed role in the center and the time allotted to center responsibilities.

Information on personnel should also be provided in their curriculum vitae. Applicants should describe duties of personnel with respect to the proposed center's research, dissemination, and leadership activities and to the management of the center.

The center program narrative is limited to the equivalent of 30 pages, where a “page” is 8.5 inches x 11 inches, on one side only, with 1 inch margins at the top, bottom, and both sides. Single space all text in the center program narrative and in Appendix B. To ensure that the text is easy for reviewers to read and that all applicants have the same amount of available space in which to describe their projects, *applicants must adhere to the type size and format specifications for the entire research narrative and Appendix B, including footnotes*. See frequently asked questions available at <https://ies.constellagroup.com> on or before September 29, 2004.

Conform to the following four requirements:

- (1) The height of the letters must not be smaller than 12 point;
- (2) Type density, including characters and spaces, must be no more than 15 characters per inch (cpi). For proportional spacing, the average for any representative section of text must not exceed 15 cpi;
- (3) No more than 6 lines of type within a vertical inch;
- (4) Margins, in all directions, must be at least 1 inch.

Applicants 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. Figures, charts, tables, and figure legends may be smaller in size but must be readily legible. The type size used must conform to all four requirements. Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the application. Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is also necessary so that no applicant will have an unfair advantage, by using small type, or providing more text in their applications. The use of small type will be grounds for the Institute to return the application without peer review. **Note, these requirements apply to the PDF file as submitted.** As a practical matter, applicants who use a 12 point Times New Roman without compressing, kerning, condensing or other alterations typically meet these requirements.

Use only black and white in graphs, diagrams, tables, and charts. The application must contain only material that reproduces well when photocopied in black and white.

The 30-page limit does *not* apply to the ED 424 form, the one-page abstract, the ED 524 form and budget narrative justification, the curriculum vitae, or reference list. Reviewers are able to conduct the highest quality review when applications are concise and easy to read, with pages numbered consecutively.

- f. *Reference list.* Please include complete citations, including titles and all authors, for literature cited in the research narrative.
- g. *Brief curriculum vita of key personnel.* Abbreviated curriculum vita should be provided for the principal investigator(s) and other key personnel. *Each vitae is limited to 3 pages and should include information sufficient to demonstrate that personnel possess training and expertise commensurate with their duties (e.g., publications, grants, relevant research experience).* The curriculum vita must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in the research narrative section.
- h. *Budget justification.* The *budget narrative justification* must provide sufficient detail to allow reviewers to judge whether reasonable costs have been attributed to the project. It must include the time commitments and brief descriptions of the responsibilities of key personnel. *The justification should correspond to the itemized breakdown of project costs that is provided in Section C.* For consultants, the narrative should include the number of days of anticipated consultation, the expected rate of compensation, travel, per diem, and other related costs. A justification for equipment purchase, supplies, travel and other related project costs should also be provided in the budget narrative for each project year outlined in Section C. For applications that include contracts for work conducted at collaborating institutions, applicants should submit an itemized budget spreadsheet for each contract for each project year, and the details of the contract costs should be included in the budget narrative.

The Institute expects that the majority of activity under these awards will be conducted off campus. Institutions are reminded to apply the off campus indirect cost rate as required by their negotiated indirect cost rate agreements. In the budget narrative, applicants should explain their calculation of indirect costs in light of the activity to be conducted off campus.

- i. *Appendix A.* In *Appendix A*, the applicant may include any figures, charts, or tables that supplement the research text, and letters of agreement from partners (e.g., schools) and consultants. Letters of agreement should include enough information to make it clear that the author of the letter understands the nature of the commitment of time, space, and resources to the research project that will be required if the application is funded. Letters of agreement from schools are not required for activities that will begin after the first year of the grant or after an extended start-up period that will be devoted in part to obtaining cooperation from schools or other education delivery settings. The appendix is limited to 15 pages.
- j. *Appendix B (optional).* For proposals in which an intervention is proposed, applicants may include in *Appendix B* up to 10 pages of examples of curriculum material, computer screens, or further description of the intervention.

Please note that applicants selected for funding will be required to submit the following certifications and assurances before a grant is issued:

- (1) SF 424B - Assurances-Non-Construction Programs

- (2) ED-80-0013 - Certification Regarding Lobbying, Debarment, Suspension and other Responsibility Matters; and Drug-Free Workplace Requirements
- (3) ED 80-0014 (if applicable) - Lower Tier Certification
- (4) SF-LLL (if applicable) - Disclosure of Lobbying Activities
- (5) Protection of Human Research Subjects assurance and/or Institutional Review Board certification, as appropriate

13. APPLICATION PROCESSING

Applications must be received by **8:00 p.m. Eastern time** on the application receipt date listed in the heading of this request for applications. Upon receipt, each application will be reviewed for completeness and for responsiveness to this request for applications.

14. PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Applications that are complete and responsive to this request will be evaluated for scientific and technical merit. Reviews will be conducted in accordance with the review criteria stated below by a panel of scientists who have substantive and methodological expertise appropriate to the program of research and request for applications.

Each application will be assigned to at least two primary reviewers who 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, an average overall score for each application will be calculated and a preliminary rank order of applications prepared before the full peer review panel convenes to complete the review of applications.

The full panel will consider only those applications deemed to have the highest merit, as reflected by the preliminary rank order, generally the top 25 to 30, and the most competitive proposals will be discussed and scored. A panel member may nominate for consideration by the full panel any proposal that he or she believes merits full panel review but would not have been included in the full panel meeting based on its preliminary rank order.

15. REVIEW CRITERIA FOR SCIENTIFIC MERIT

The goal of the centers is to contribute to the solution of education problems and to produce and disseminate reliable information about the education practices that support learning and improve academic achievement and access to education for all students. Reviewers will be expected to assess the following aspects of an application in order to judge the likelihood that the proposed center will have a substantial impact on the pursuit of that goal. Information pertinent to each of these criteria is also described above in the section on Requirements of the Proposed Center and in the description of the center program narrative, which appears in the section on Contents and Page Limits of Application.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Significance | Does the applicant present a strong rationale for the center? Does the applicant provide a strong justification for the focus of the center? Does the applicant make a compelling case for the potential contribution of the center to the solution of an education problem? |
|--------------|--|

Plans for Focused
Program of
Research

Does the applicant present (a) a strong rationale for the focused program of research; (b) clear hypotheses or research questions; (c) clear descriptions of and strong rationales for the sample, the measures, data collection procedures, and research design; and (d) a detailed and well-justified data analysis plan? Does the research plan meet the requirements described in the section on the Requirements of the Proposed Center and in the description of the center program narrative in the section on Contents and Page Limits? Is the research plan appropriate for answering the research questions or testing the proposed hypotheses?

Other Activities

Does the content of the examples of proposed supplementary studies, dissemination activities, and leadership activities and the description of the applicant's capacity to conduct such projects suggest that the applicant has the ideas, experience, and capability to successfully carry-out such projects in cooperation with the Institute?

Personnel

Does the description of the personnel make it apparent that the principal investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess the training and experience and will commit sufficient time to competently conduct the proposed research, carry out other center responsibilities (e.g., dissemination and leadership activities), and manage the proposed center?

Resources

Does the applicant have the facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources required to support the proposed activities? Do the commitments of each partner show support for the implementation and success of the proposed center activities?

16. RECEIPT AND REVIEW SCHEDULE

Letter of Intent Receipt Date: September 17, 2004

Application Receipt Date: November 18, 2004, 8:00 p.m. Eastern time

Earliest Anticipated Start Date: June 1, 2005

17. AWARD DECISIONS

The following will be considered in making award decisions:

Scientific merit

Responsiveness to the requirements of this request

Performance and use of funds under a previous Federal award

Contribution to the overall program of research described in this request

Availability of funds

18. INQUIRIES MAY BE SENT TO:

For Goal One: National Research and Development Center on Assessment

Dr. David Sweet
Institute of Education Sciences
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208
Email: David.Sweet@ed.gov
Telephone: (202) 219-1748

For Goal Two: National Research and Development Center on Education Policy

Dr. Ram Singh
Institute of Education Sciences
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208

Email: Ram.Singh@ed.gov
Telephone: (202) 219-2025

For Goal Three: National Research and Development Center on Early Childhood

Dr. James Griffin
Institute of Education Sciences
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208

Email: James.Griffin@ed.gov
Telephone: (202) 219-2280

For Goal Four: National Research and Development Center on English Language Learners

Dr. Diana Cordova
Institute of Education Sciences
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20208

Email: Diana.Cordova@ed.gov
Telephone: (202) 219-2297

19. PROGRAM AUTHORITY

20 U.S.C. 9501 et seq., the “Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002,” Title I of Public Law 107-279, November 5, 2002. This program is not subject to the intergovernmental review requirements of Executive Order 12372.

20. APPLICABLE REGULATIONS: The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 74, 77, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 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.

21. REFERENCES

Schilder, D., Kiron, E., & Elliott, K. (2003). *Early care and education partnerships: State actions and local lessons*. Newton, Massachusetts: Education Development Center, Inc.

Zill, N., Resnick, G., Kim, K., O'Donnell, K., Sorongon, A., and others. (2003). *Head Start FACES 2000: A whole-child perspective on program performance*. Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.