U.S. Department of Education - EDCAPS
G5-Technical Review Form (New)

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)
Reader #1:   **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	15
Sub Total	15	15
Strategy to Scale		
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	20	19
Sub Total	20	19
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	20	18
Adequacy of Resources		
1. Quality of the Management	20	15
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	25	
Sub Total	65	33
Priority Questions		
CPP1		
Computer Science		
1. Computer Science	5	
Sub Total	5	
Total	105	67

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - EIR Mid-Phase - 1: 84.411B

Reader #1:   **********

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

1. **(1) The national significance of the proposed project.**

   Strengths:

   The application indicates 16,000 high-needs K-4 students will be served through the expansion of virtual literacy support programming (p. e19). The discussion of significance notes the established importance of literacy tutoring, particularly in grades K-3. For example, on page e24 the proposal describes that literacy tutoring can have a profound and positive impact on student literacy achievement. The project proposes scaling up a proven model in a virtual context, meeting the critical need for virtual solutions that support high-needs students. Clear and specific data is provided to establish the need for literacy intervention in the early grades. For example, the proposal notes that only 21% of 4th graders were reading proficiently in 2019 and proposes that the impact of COVID disruptions on education are expected to exacerbate that gap, particularly for high-needs students (p. e25). Prior early-phase research on the proposed intervention supports it as an effective method of supporting growth in literacy, demonstrating the strong national significance of the proposed project. (p. e24-e27)

   Weaknesses:

   There are no weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

   Strengths:

   The project's original tutoring intervention was developed as a one-on-one, in-person model delivered in school settings. The change to a virtual delivery model was made during COVID-19, and the applicant transitions to deliver 94% of sessions virtually since that time. The initial outcome data shows very promising results from this new online delivery model (p. e28). This proposed project will produce new evidence on tutoring programs in a virtual setting and clarify how these specific implementation supports lead to potential improvements in student literacy. (p. e27-e29)

Sub

> **Weaknesses:**

There are no weaknesses noted.

> **Reader's Score:**

Strategy to Scale - Strategy to Scale

1. **The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to scale the proposed project. In determining the applicant's capacity to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 19

> **Sub**

1. **(1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.**

   Strengths:

   The proposal describes the unmet demand for tutoring in K-12 education and aligns that need to the compounding problem of the existing inequities in access for literacy interventions (p. e29). The applicant indicates that a lack of technology resources may be a barrier to participation for some participants and teachers and therefore, proposes targeted grant funds to help participants and teachers access the program (GEPA statement, p. e11). Additionally, the proposal discusses other barriers including limitations on the staff and resources needed to expand in-person tutoring, including a lack of local volunteers. The project proposed to address this barrier through the virtual tutoring model that removes geographic and travel restraints. The presented barriers clearly have implications for potential project scaling, and the proposal addresses each barrier presented with a clear strategy for mitigation. (p. e30-e33)

   Weaknesses:

   The narrative and attached implementation report specifically note tutor attendance and retention as a challenge to implementation (p. e180). However, the applicant does not fully address strategies to address this challenge beyond removing geographic and travel restraints. It is unclear how the project will seek to solve the challenge with online tutor attendance and retention as it moves forward with scaling the project, which is a noted weakness because the absence of qualified personnel will reduce the likelihood for the project to scale and serve the proposed number of students.

   Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The mechanisms that applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant will gather evidence during the implementation of the proposed project to ensure the organization can successfully replicate the program beyond the grant funded sites and award period. The proposal describes how evidence gathered through implementation and evaluation will be disseminated at conferences, workshops, and national advocacy organizations to share best practices and evaluation results. This is a noted strength, as it demonstrates a clear plan to share outcomes with national audiences to inform future research and replication. (p. e33-e34)

Sub

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 18

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework.**

    Strengths:

    The proposal presents a logic model for the project (p. e152). The model is clear, and specifies inputs, mediators, moderators, and student outcomes. The relationship between elements is clearly represented and creates a rationale for how the project plans to achieve the goal of improving student literacy achievement. The framework is explained in the narrative, and the proposal clearly specifies the training and curricular approaches that have been selected for the project. (p. e34-e35)

    Weaknesses:

    The proposal does not clearly reference the research or evidence underlying the conceptual framework. For example, the content of the project's curricular materials are not clearly described. This is a key aspect of the potential success of the project, and it is not clear how the curricular materials were developed and if there is a research base to support them. This is a noted weakness because it is not clear that these materials are built upon evidence-based strategies that would increase the likelihood for improved student outcomes. Additionally, information on the dosage for volunteer training and a rationale for the twice weekly sessions would help clarify this element and why twice a week was selected. Finally, the application does not address any conceptual or framework elements related to the shift to a virtual format for program delivery. This is a weakness, as the virtual delivery platform is the key strategy to scale, and yet it is not clear how the program team utilized research to inform that transition to digital to ensure student success. (p. e34-e35)

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.**

    Strengths:

    The overall goal of this work is to increase student literacy achievement. The application provides clear, specific, and measurable objectives and outcomes. The objectives of the project include building organizational capacity, improving student outcomes, conducting a successful evaluation, and scaling the program. The proposal presents a clear plan to achieve an improvement in student literacy outcomes with specific and measurable action steps (p. e37-e39)

Sub

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**

Strengths:

Approximately 16,000 K-4 students will be impacted, which is a large number of students and contribute to the potential significance (p. e19). Targeted participants will be in Title I schools and are identified as being six months to two-and-a-half years behind grade level in reading. The applicant indicates that a lack of technology resources may be a barrier to participation for some participants and teachers and proposes targeted grant funds to help participants and teachers access the program (GEPA statement, p. e11). This is a strength, as it addresses previous digital access inequities with resources to meet the needs of the target population. In past iterations of the program, the implementation relied on brick and mortar reading centers where volunteers work with students, which limited the scale of implementation (p. e26). The proposal describes that online tutors will participate in a rigorous training program that includes practice with implementation and ongoing support. Additionally, the training includes cultural competency modules that support equity and inclusive practices, ensuring the needs of the target population are met (p. e28). The proposal successfully describes multiple strategies to meet the needs of the target population to achieve the goal of improving student literacy outcomes.

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

1. **(1) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.**

Strengths:

The applicant states the project team has extensive experience in managing literacy instruction and large-scale implementation projects. The proposal describes previous experience in managing a randomized control trial project, which is a strength as it mirrors the grant expectations that would be in place for this project. Additionally, information on project personnel is provided and all individuals appear to have the relevant experience in alignment with high level grant activities (p. e38-e39)

Weaknesses:

The application does not discuss a project management or administrative structure. For example, it is not clear if a core project team will be established, and if so, how often they will meet. This is a noted weakness, as the lack of an administrative plan calls into question the projects ability to successfully achieve a project of this scale. Additionally, assurance that adequate procedures are in place for grant and financial accountability and management is not provided. Finally, the position descriptions identifying qualifications for key personnel are not provided. This is a weakness, as it is not clear if the project personnel will have the appropriate expertise in their specific roles to achieve the project as described. (p. e32-e37)

Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

    Strengths:

    A clear and detailed management plan is provided. The project is broken into three phases: planning, evaluation, and program scaling. A timeline with high-level milestones is provided, and explained in the narrative. For example, activities related to tutor and student recruitment will be completed during the planning phase, ending in August 2023. The inclusion of specific actions related to both program implementation and project management is a noted strength because it demonstrates a plan for how these elements will take place to achieve the stated goal of improving student literacy outcomes. (p. e39-e41)

    Weaknesses:

    The proposed management plan and timeline chart, lack detail in the presentation of milestones with annual delivery dates. The inclusion of additional details, such as including milestones at quarterly or monthly intervals, would clarify how the project team intends to achieve the objective as presented. The annual milestones may not be sufficiently detailed to ensure progress towards objectives and achievement of the project goal. (p. e39-e41)

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

    Strengths:

    The budget proposed is reasonable in relation to the objectives and design of this project, as well as to its potential significance (p. e41). A detailed budget narrative is provided (p. e325-e331), and it shows how costs are allocated to cover the main phases of planning, evaluation, and scaling. The costs are reasonable and comprehensive to successfully achieve the grant as proposed.

    Weaknesses:

    There are no weaknesses noted.

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score:

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

CPP1 - Computer Science

1. **Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).**

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/06/2021 03:49 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)
Reader #2:   **********

Questions	Points Possible	Points Scored
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	15
Sub Total	15	15
Strategy to Scale		
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	20	19
Sub Total	20	19
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	20	18
Adequacy of Resources		
1. Quality of the Management	20	15
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	25	0
Sub Total	65	33
Priority Questions		
CPP1		
Computer Science		
1. Computer Science	5	
Sub Total	5	
Total	105	67

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - EIR Mid-Phase - 1: 84.411B

Reader #2:   **********

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **15**

    Sub

1. **(1) The national significance of the proposed project.**

   Strengths:

   This project will offer a previously successful in-person intervention in an online format, which has value for school districts across the nation because of increased needs to provide access to students beyond the four walls of the classroom. (p. e27-e28) COVID-19 has motivated the nation to have options for online learning and interventions for K-12, so the movement from in-person to online for this approach is a strength as it aligns with the national need for more digital solutions in education.

   The applicant notes that across the nation there is a need for expansions in tutoring to address learning gaps and learning loss, particularly for those who can't afford private and one-on-one tutoring. (p. e29) This project directly addresses this particular need and is a strength because it provides a potential solution that has national significance in light of the needs of students post-pandemic while reducing overall costs to expand access.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses are noted.

   Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

   Strengths:

   The plan includes lessons on social-emotional learning (SEL) topics to meet the increasing need for SEL among students. Reading Partners is currently evaluating the impact of these lessons on students' social-emotional skills, and with positive results, the impact of the program would go beyond academics to build confidence in students. (p. e27) This is a noted strength because of the inclusion of the social-emotional topics to broaden the potential outcomes and increase our understanding of how SEL and literacy learning can be addressed in digital settings to improve student outcomes.

   Continued research about online approaches for increasing student achievement will build greater understanding of the successful strategies and variations of online instruction. This project alters the continuous the online approach

so that a "live" online tutor works with the student two days per week. This variation is a strenth for the application because it will offer insight into a strategy that has been successful when offered in person but has not yet been studied as an on-line approach. (p. e27 -e29)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Reader's Score:

Strategy to Scale - Strategy to Scale

1. **The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to scale the proposed project. In determining the applicant's capacity to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 19

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant identifies the high need for tutoring but the lack of ability to provide for that need. (p. e29-e30) For example, one of the barriers addressed in the proposal is funding. Funding is the essential resources to scale the in-person project, which currently uses resources from AmeriCorps, private philanthropy, and fee-for-service. The project proposes a strategy to overcome the funding barrier through the procurement of additional philanthropy that will result from the attraction gained by the expansion and success of the proposed project. In addition, the project notes that additional financial assistance will be gained from grant funding should this grant be approved. These are acceptable strategies to overcome this barrier and reach the proposed scale. (p. e31)

   Additionally, the applicant states that the in-person Reading Partners program lacked enough volunteers to scale the tutoring to serve additional schools and communities. The proposal will shift the tutoring to an online format, which will remove geographic restrictions that result in travel time for the volunteers. This reduction in travel time ultimately reduces the time commitment and allows a larger group of volunteers with more diverse backgrounds to participate. (p. e31) This creates an opportunity to greatly expand tutor recruitment and participation and is a strength of the application as it clearly creates a solution to scaling the project to serve more students with more tutors.

   Finally, the proposal includes a specific plan for scaling the project, on pages e32 and e33, which includes the addition of personnel and expansion of the existing AmeriCorps partnership. The proposal also indicates the need for web and product development to improve the online interface. This plan to scale explains the justification and reasoning for some of the costs associated with the digital development and strengthens the application by presenting a clear plan to serve more students.

Weaknesses:

The study report on pages e166 through e183 provides information about the in-person Reading Partners program along with impact information and key findings. One of the issues noted was tutor attendance and retention, which could be considered a barrier to implementation as well for scaling the new proposed project. (p. e180) The applicant does not address this barrier for the online proposal, so may be missing an important element regarding the program's ability to scale. This omission is a noted weakness, as it is not clear that the team has developed a clear strategy to address tutor recruitment and retention for the online platform. The lack of qualified personnel would significantly impact the project's ability to serve more students.

Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The mechanisms that applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant discusses a plan to disseminate results and information from the project through participation in national conferences and workshops. The team also proposes that the evaluator will assist with these efforts by producing reports and participating in conferences to discuss outcomes and effectiveness of the proposed strategies. In addition, the applicant and evaluator will work through collaborations with national advocacy organizations, such as EdTrust and the Learning Policy Institute, to share project results. (p. e34) Stating specific organizations that will be used for dissemination strengthens this application, as it demonstrates a clear plan to reach various stakeholder groups to improve the potential for replication.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses are noted.

   Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 18

1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework.**

   Strengths:

   Reading Partners' created curriculum, lesson plans, and tutor guides to improve student literacy, and those resources are the foundation for the online program proposed by this grant. (p. e26 and e35) The existing, in-person Reading Partners program has demonstrated success in improving student outcomes and is the framework for the new online program that is one of the key strategies for the project. This is a noted strength because the project is building on previous successes to reach their goal of improving student literacy at scale. (p. e168-183)

   Additionally, on pages e178 and e179 of the proposal, the narrative provides details regarding the key framework components that the in-person Reading Partners was built upon. These elements are consistent with the logic model on page e152. Together, these strengthen the application because it illustrates how the program activities

will work together to improve student literacy outcomes. The coherence of these elements is a key strength and demonstrates a clear plan and research base for the early literacy interventions.

Weaknesses:

This application does not clearly align the key components on pages e178 and e179 with the new online platform element of the project. The lack of clear framework or research related to online learning is a noted weakness because the online platform is a key strategy to achieve the scale and access that is being proposed to address national needs.

The research to support the selection of curriculum, design of lesson plans, and tutor guides is not shared. The applicant discusses that the curriculum is research-based on page e35, but it does not include evidence indicating success or specific citations with outcomes. This is a noted weakness because the quality of the framework referenced from the previous study cannot be evaluated due to the lack of supporting research.

Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.**

   Strengths:

   This project has four objectives listed in a chart on pages e36 through e37. The first objective, related to building organizational capacity, has three activities along with an outcome for each. The applicant clearly states what the target is for each of the activities along with the measure. For example, for the first activity, to recruit and hire Reading Partners staff, AmeriCorps member, and volunteers, the target is 16 Reading Partners staff, 281 AmeriCorps members, and 7,959 volunteers and will be measured by the achievement of recruitment and hiring at these specific levels. Additionally, objective 2, related to academic growth, also has clearly stated, measurable targets stating that 80% of the participating students will meet or exceed their primary, individualized end-of-year literacy growth goal. (p. e37) Finally, objective 4, related to scaling the program, notes that the measurable goal is 16,327 students will receive the treatment from 2022 through 2025. (p. e37) The proposal provides clearly specified and measurable goals which strengthen the application, as it demonstrates the specific targets that will measure the success of the project and aligns those measures with the final goal of improving student learning outcomes.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses are noted.

   Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**

   Strengths:

   The target population is students in grades kindergarten through fourth grade who are six months to two-and-a-half years behind their reading grade level. (p. e34) This aligns with the needs of the community members. For example, a statement from Dallas Independent School District describes their need for 150 elementary schools to participate in tutoring, but they have only 45 schools because of the lack of partners. This exemplifies the alignment of the project to needs from their target population. In addition, the District of Columbia Public Schools requested a 56% increase in numbers of students served by tutoring. This is a noted strength for the application because there is a clear demand for tutoring for early literacy skills for students, which the online Reading Partners program can successfully address. By aligning the project with the community needs, the project is more likely to have successful recruitment and participation in the project and research. (p. e30)

Sub

    Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 15

    Sub

1. **(1) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.**

    Strengths:

The key personnel for the project are listed on pages e38 and e39 along with descriptions of their previous experience. All of the project personnel demonstrate previous experience either with Reading Partners or with the evaluation of the program. This is a strength because it allows the personnel to have historical understanding of the program, and increased clarity on their expected roles and responsibilities during the project implementation. Resumes are also provided for lead project personnel beginning on page e55. The identified personnel are a strength of this application because there is strong evidence that these individuals have the experience and knowledge to manage the overall project and complete their individual responsibilities.

The chart on pages e157 through e161 shows current staff from each organization, along with staff to be hired for the management of the project. The specific responsibilities of each position for current staff are also listed. These descriptions support the time allocations for each staff member shown on pages e325 through e327 and demonstrate that the project has the capacity to address the implementation as proposed.

    Weaknesses:

The proposal does not clearly describe the position descriptions and required qualifications for the positions which will be hired. It is not clear what specific expertise will be sought related to the scope of work. The lack of details regarding the needed experience and training for these positions weakens this area of the application, as it is not clear they will have the expertise to complete their responsibilities. (p. e159 and e325-e327)

Additionally, the applicant does not discuss the fiscal management of the grant, which is a noted weakness because it is not clear the organization has the systems in place to manage a grant of this scale. (e157-e161)

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

Strengths:

The chart on pages e36 and e37 shows the milestones for the objectives, along with the activities and year of completion, as well as the organization responsible for that particular activity. This is a strength of the application because the chart elements in the chart are aligned and also give more description regarding the key objectives. The high-level activities are clearly presented, and demonstrate a plan to achieve the goal of the project to improve student literacy academic outcomes.

Weaknesses:

The timeline for the milestones from pages e39 and e40 needs more detail so that progress toward milestones and objectives can be assessed on a monthly or quarterly basis rather than by year. The lack of these details is a noted weakness, because intermittent and more frequent checks increases the likelihood of accomplishing these tasks and the overall project.

Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

Strengths:

For this project, there will be an expected 70,000 students who will benefit from the Reading Partners program, which is significant in scale and potential outcomes. (p. e41) The budget for the project is $8 million, resulting in a cost per student of approximately $114.29 which is very reasonable, especially in relation to the traditional costs for in-person tutoring options for students in grades K-4.

Because of the development of materials and protocols, the benefits of the project have the potential to reach beyond the grant period. The development costs should be reduced beyond the initial iteration, and the protocols can be shared with other future replication sites. In addition, information gained through completion of the project will inform future expansions. These elements will reduce the costs for future replication and increase the likelihood for scaling.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 0

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

Sub

    Strengths:

    N/A

    Weaknesses:

    N/A

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.**

    Strengths:

    N/A

    Weaknesses:

    N/A

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

    Strengths:

    N/A

    Weaknesses:

    N/A

    Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

CPP1 - Computer Science

1. **Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/06/2021 04:26 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)
Reader #3:   **********

		Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Significance			
1. Significance		15	0
	Sub Total	15	0
Strategy to Scale			
Strategy to Scale			
1. Strategy to Scale		20	0
	Sub Total	20	0
Selection Criteria			
Quality of Project Design			
1. Project Design		20	0
Adequacy of Resources			
1. Quality of the Management		20	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		25	14
	Sub Total	65	14
Priority Questions			
CPP1			
Computer Science			
1. Computer Science		5	
	Sub Total	5	
	Total	105	14

Panel #1 - EIR Mid-Phase - 1: 84.411B

Reader #3:   **********

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **0**

   Sub

  1. **(1) The national significance of the proposed project.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

  2. **(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Strategy to Scale - Strategy to Scale

1. **The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to scale the proposed project. In determining the applicant's capacity to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **0**

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The mechanisms that applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **0**

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.**

Sub

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 0

    Sub

1. **(1) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

    Strengths:

Sub

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **14**

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

    Strengths:

    The applicant proposed a student-level randomized controlled trial (RCT) design (p. e43) to study the impact of Reading Partners Connects (RPCx) on elementary students' reading achievement. A previous evaluation study had low overall and differential attrition rates (p. e44), which suggests the proposed study may also have low attrition rates and, therefore, meet the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards without reservations. This is a noted strength because it has the potential to meet rigorous criteria for establishing the effectiveness of the program for future scaling and replication. In addition, the assessments used for measuring student outcomes show face validity (p. e43) and demonstrate an acceptable range for reliability (p. e44). The outcome measures are not over aligned with the intervention (p. e44). Finally, the use of regression imputation methodology for the treatment of the missing data (p. e45), meets WWC requirement for missing outcome data and demonstrates specific actions the evaluation is taking to strong produce evidence of the project's effectiveness.

    Weaknesses:

    The proposal includes a description of the project's student sample that lacks clarity. This is a noted weakness because it leads to the impression that students in the control condition in the 2023-24 cohort may include students who have been exposed to RPCx in the previous school year. For example, on page e43, the applicant stated, "the confirmatory impact analyses will be conducted on the pooled sample". Additionally, on page e45, the applicant stated, "while some students in the sample may have received RPCx in a previous year, the random assignment will ensure that these students are equally distributed between the treatment and the control groups in each evaluation year." The inclusion of students exposed to the intervention in the control group will contaminate the RCT

design, which would disqualify the evaluation to meet WWC standards, especially when there is no baseline equivalence testing.

Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant will interview program leadership, school staff, and site-based program coordinators to identify barriers to and successes in program implementation and scaling (p. e49). This is a noted strength, as it demonstrates a clear plan to gather information about the implementation of the program to inform future replication and testing in other settings. Additionally, the proposal includes a plan to conduct a cost study that includes schools in the RCT study as well as schools in environments similar to the RCT schools. The inclusion of schools outside of the project participants allows the study an opportunity to understand the cost implication for scaling (p. e28). This is a strength of the proposal because the cost of the strategy is a key component for consideration when considering implementation.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses are noted.

   Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

   Strengths:

   The evaluation plan includes five research questions to examine student outcome and program implementation (p. e42), which is comprehensive and in alignment with the proposed project implementation plan. The evaluator will examine the mediator effects of implementation fidelity on student outcomes (p. e46). Additionally, the fidelity measures are comprehensive and detailed with three levels of thresholds to describe implementation fidelity (p. e47 and Exhibit D in Appendix J). The project plans to collect implementation data through various methods including a teacher survey, program staff and teacher interviews, program data, and secondary data sources. The use of various datasets to inform the outcome is a strength because it allows for the evaluation team to build a deeper understanding of both program implementation and how that relates to student learning outcomes. The program impact on student outcome is represented by one measure of each of the three dimensions of literacy as noted on page e.43 and Exhibit E in Appendix J. This is a strength of the evaluation plan because it makes the outcome analyses more focused and keeps the need for multiple comparisons more manageable and streamlined.

   Weaknesses:

   The proposal lacks clarity on the use of service contrast (p. e47 & e322) as mediators for answering research question 3. The lack of detail is a weakness because it is not clear how mediators will be used in analyses which impacts the potential success of the overall evaluation plan.

   The proposal also describes the intent to administer three assessments, which may pose a substantial burden on elementary students. It is not clear how the test results inform the student services, and why all three assessments are necessary to the project. Noting the extensive nature of the proposed assessments, the applicant needs to address strategies to mitigate risks associated with attrition, especially among schools and students in the control condition. The perceived burden of the three assessments and potential impact on attrition of the control group are noted weaknesses that may impact the success of the evaluation.

Sub

    Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

CPP1 - Computer Science

1. **Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/09/2021 10:00 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)
Reader #4:   **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	
Sub Total	15	
Strategy to Scale		
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	20	
Sub Total	20	
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	20	
Adequacy of Resources		
1. Quality of the Management	20	
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	25	16
Sub Total	65	16
Priority Questions		
CPP1		
Computer Science		
1. Computer Science	5	
Sub Total	5	
Total	105	16

Technical Review Form

Reader #4: * * * * * * * * * *

Applicant: Reading Partners (S411B210018)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score:

   Sub

   1. **(1) The national significance of the proposed project.**

      Strengths:

      Weaknesses:

      Reader's Score:

   2. **(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

      Strengths:

      Weaknesses:

      Reader's Score:

Strategy to Scale - Strategy to Scale

1. **The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to scale the proposed project. In determining the applicant's capacity to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score:

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The mechanisms that applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score:

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.**

Sub

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score:

    Sub

1. **(1) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

    Strengths:

Sub

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

    Strengths:

    Weaknesses:

    Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **16**

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

    Strengths:

    The proposed evaluation is a student-level randomized controlled trial (blocked by school and grade level, students are randomly assigned to treatment or control), which can allow for the highest possible What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) rating, Meets Standards without Reservations, to be achieved (page e43). This is a noted strength of the evaluation design, as it would lead to evidence-based outcomes to inform future community practice.

    The student outcome measures have face validity, acceptable reliabilities, and do not appear to be over aligned with either study condition (page e43). The assessments will be administered to both conditions in the same manner and there do not appear to be any confounds that would affect WWC rating (page e43-44). The proposal indicates the evaluators have previous success conducting a similarly designed RCT with low attrition. Therefore, low overall and differential attrition is anticipated for the proposed study (page e44). These are noted strengths and demonstrate potential to achieve the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations.

    Weaknesses:

    While the proposal indicates a history of low attrition with similarly designed RCT, the possibility of high attrition must still be considered as a factor in this research. If it is determined that there is high attrition, a pre-test must be included for each eligible outcome in order to determine baseline equivalence of the study conditions as required by WWC criteria,. However, a pre-test is not specified in the proposal. In the event of high attrition, the absence of an eligible pre-test for each eligible outcome would lead to the study being rated as Does Not Meet WWC Group

Sub

Design Standards. The proposed analytic model will control for students' fall reading skills, but it is not made clear if this can or will be used as a baseline measure if attrition is high (page e45).

It is not clear if students will have the possibility of participating in the study for two consecutive years. If they do, it is not clear if some students may be in the control condition one year and the treatment in the other year. Likewise, it is not clear if students will experience two treatment years or two control years. This is a noted weakness because it influences how the control and treatment groups will be defined and how their data should be analyzed.

Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.**

Strengths:

The evaluation intends to include a diverse student sample in term of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and size, and the team will conduct exploratory analyses to investigate how the intervention impacts are moderated by baseline factors such as reading proficiency, English Learner status, and grade level (e46). This is a noted strength of the proposal that will help inform stakeholders that serve diverse students who wish to implement the intervention, replicate, or extend findings.

A teacher survey in the spring of each evaluation year will be used to collect information about the services for literacy support (both hours of service and types of service) students in treatment and control conditions received. The survey data will provide context about student experiences in "business as usual" (BAU) group as well as the treatment group (page e47; e287). A teacher incentive is included, helping reduce the risk of not obtaining this data (e330).

The extent to which other factors may influence the intervention implementation will be addressed through data collected from coordinators including teacher attitudes about virtual tutoring/earning and existing literacy support services. Likewise, data about school characteristic will be summarized (page e47). These factors will help stakeholders to understand the contexts in which the intervention is effective.

Finally, a cost analysis, including the ingredients approach (page e47-48), will allow stakeholders to determine the feasibility of implementing the intervention from a budgetary standpoint

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

Strengths:

The analytic plan details planned analyses for each of the 5 research questions, describing both quantitative and qualitative analysis plans with well-aligned outcomes (pages e42-49). This is a strength of the proposal, as it allows stakeholders to not only consider the impact on student outcomes, but also the feasibility of implementation.

The proposal addresses mediators that include total hours of reading support provided to treatment students, the hours specifically spent in the treatment program, as well as fidelity of implementation. The evaluation includes six core elements of implementation for which fidelity is measured (e46). A fidelity index (using five of the six elements)

Sub

was developed as part of a previous evaluation of the intervention, and it has established thresholds for which fidelity is determined (pages e46 & e210-211). The expectations are clear and measurable, which is a noted strength.

Weaknesses:

The proposed evaluation explains why first grade students will not be assessed on reading comprehension (page e44), but it does not explain if the same data collection limitation exists for kindergarten participants. This is a noted weakness of the proposal because it influences the type of data that will be shared with stakeholders at the outcome of the study.

Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

CPP1 - Computer Science

1. **Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).**

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/09/2021 12:00 PM