

ORDE "KNOW YOUR AGENCY" SERIES: INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES (IES)

<http://ies.ed.gov/>

OVERVIEW

The Institute of Education Sciences, a component of the US Department of Education (ED), was authorized in the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2001. This agency's mission "is to expand fundamental knowledge and understanding of education and to provide education leaders and practitioners, parents and students, researchers and the general public with unbiased, reliable and useful information about the condition and progress of education in the United States " (Source: IES Director's Biennial Report to Congress, Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012, November 2013, p. 1).

Specific Interests

IES is responsible for all education levels, from pre-K through postsecondary, and has an annual budget in excess of \$600 million. The agency supports both in-house and external research programs. Original data collection and educational database management are also agency responsibilities. Research topics of interest to the agency include early childhood education, social/emotional needs of students in the classroom, postsecondary access/retention, new educational intervention development and assessment, student outcomes improvement and best educational approaches and interventions for students with disabilities. IES also prioritizes dissemination activities related to research findings. IES is responsible for operation of the What Works Clearinghouse that provides access to reports synthesizing educational research results. The agency also manages the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), housing reports and publications on educational research supported by IES and other ED components.

Approach

The phrase most often used to describe research efforts supported by IES is "scientifically rigorous". Peer review is standard and the emphasis is on supporting research relevant to practitioners and policy makers that represent real outcomes for students and their parents.

AGENCY ORGANIZATION

IES is headed by a Director, a Presidential appointee confirmed by the Senate. Two Deputy Directors (Science and Administration and Policy) round out IES leadership. There are over 200 staff members including research scientists and statisticians. The National Board for Education Sciences (NBES), responsible for IES oversight, is composed of 15 education experts appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. IES is arranged into 4 Centers, each headed by Commissioners who are recommended for their positions by the NBES:

1. National Center for Education Research (NCER)
2. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
3. National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEEERA)
4. National Center for Special Education Research (NCSEER)

While all Centers provide funding opportunities, most grant programs run through NCER and NCSEER.

EXTERNAL FUNDING PROGRAM

IES Centers fund research projects as grants, contracts and cooperative agreements. In Fiscal Year 2014, NCER had one grant deadline (September). Eligible applicants include universities and colleges, local area agencies (LEAs), state educational agencies (SEAs), states, non-profits and businesses. Applications are submitted via Grants.gov. Grant competitions include:

- Education Research Grants
- Statistical/Research Methodologies in Education
- Partnerships and Collaborations Focused on Problems of Practice or Policy
- Special Education Research Grants (not offered in FY2014)

NCER, the major external funder within IES, received 1689 applications and funded 161 projects – representing a 9.5% success rate – during Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012.

Additional Funding Mechanisms:

This year, IES is providing an opportunity for applicants to submit unsolicited ideas for research projects that 1) do not fit under the grants programs offered or 2) would address time-sensitive research questions falling outside

the normal application schedule. The required 6-page prospectus may be submitted anytime. IES also offers postdoctoral training grants.

Contact with AGENCY Program Staff:

Applicants are encouraged to contact program officers who can advise applicants on appropriate choice of research topic and goal. IES program officers will also provide guidance in terms of applicants’ research ideas, and given enough lead time, will offer constructive tips on draft project narratives.

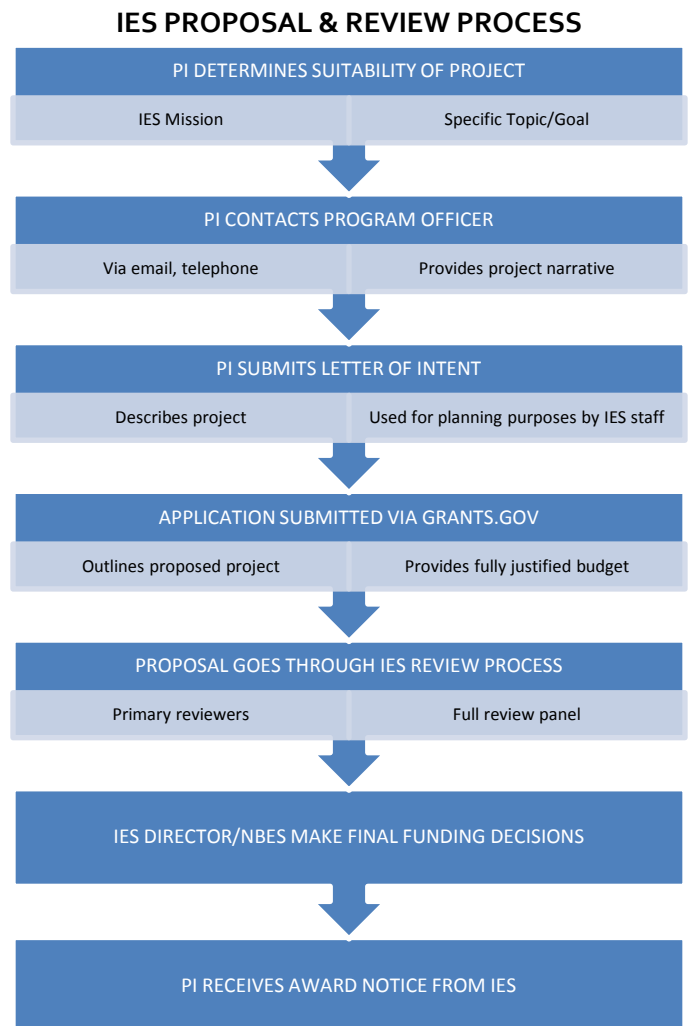
Typical IES Application Process:

- 1) PI determines suitability of proposed project to IES mission, specific research topic and goal
- 2) PI contacts program officer for assistance and questions about application
- 3) PI submits optional letter of intent (LOI) describing project; LOI used by agency staff to plan for application review
- 4) PI submits application via Grants.gov
- 5) Primary reviewers are assigned and review the application, providing both a criteria review score and an overall score
- 6) Overall scores are used by agency personnel to determine application rankings; highest-ranking applications then move forward for consideration by full review panel
- 7) Standing review panel discusses applications
- 8) Panel members score applications and provide funding recommendations
- 9) The IES Director, in consultation with the NBES, makes final funding decisions
- 10) Successful PI receives award notice from IES

Proposal Review Process:

By legislative mandate, IES must use peer review for all grants and cooperative agreements exceeding \$100,000. IES modeled their peer review process on that of the National Institutes of Health. The IES Standards and Review Office (SRO) is responsible for identifying qualified reviewers, providing panel assignments and calculating triage scores. Each application has two reviewers and those involving randomized trials are assigned a third reviewer with expertise in that methodology. Reviewers assess applications on the basis of 4 criteria: Significance, Research Plan, Personnel and Resources. Reviewers first provide 2 scores: one for each review criterion and an

overall score for each application. The overall score is not a composite of all review criteria scores but rather the reviewer’s overall impression of application quality. Overall scores determine application rankings for triage purposes. Highest-ranking applications move on to full panel review. During full panel review, primary reviewers advocate for applications they reviewed. All panel members then assign merit review scores and funding recommendation ratings for each. These scores and recommendations are then forwarded to the IES Director who, in consultation with the National Board for Education Sciences, makes final funding decisions.



What Happens Next?

All applicants receive primary reviewer comments. Those applicants that make it to full panel review also receive summaries of panel comments. Successful applicants receive award notification by July and move forward with their research projects. Those not selected for funding may re-apply, incorporating reviewer comments.