Moderator: Sharon Burton
March 3, 2008
5:30 PM ET

Sharon Burton: Okay. Thank you for joining us on this call. If you are participating in this call, this is the Partnerships in Character Education Program Grant Competition Conference Call, which is designed to provide you with information from the U.S. Department of Education about the ongoing competition which ends on March 31st.

My name is Sharon Burton. I am the Competition Manager and contact for this grant. In addition to me being on the call today, I have Dr. Elizabeth Warner, who is with our Institute for Educational Sciences here at the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Warner will be answering questions about the evidence-based program evaluation priority or any questions related to the evaluation portion of this grant.

Welcome to the first of a series of four dial-in calls that will be hosted for the Partnerships in Character Education Program Grant Competition for fiscal year 2008. The purpose of the dial-in calls is to provide an opportunity for the public and potential applicants to ask questions about the grant competition and procedures to apply that will support a successful submission of an application.

The purpose of the Partnerships in Character Education Program is to provide grants to eligible entities to assist them in designing and implementing character education projects that teach students the elements of character, such as caring, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, and civic virtue, just to name a few. Eligible applicants are listed in the Federal Register Announcements and in the application package, which is found on page 27.

In order to apply for a grant under the Program Competition this year, an applicant must meet the Absolute Priority for this grant. There is also a Competitive Preference Priority which focuses on evidenced-based evaluation. In an effort to promote the use of rigorous and scientific-based research methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the Partnerships in Character Education Project, additional points will be awarded to applicants that choose to apply and meet the Competitive Preference Priority. Up to 20 points will be added.

During this call we will be taking notes, as well as on the future calls, to capture the questions that you ask of us, and responses to those questions, so that they may be posted

on the following websites for your review. The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools' website which is found on the U.S. Department of Education's website, and that is www.e(as in egg)d(as in dog).gov/o(as in office)s(as in safe)d(as in drug)f(as in free)s (as in school). So again, that website is www.ed.gov/osdf(as in Frank)s(as in Sharon). We also will be posting information on our Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center website. That is found at www.c(as in cat)e(as in egg)t(as in Tom)a(as in apple)c(as in cat).org. Again, the website is www.cetac.org. Again, that is the Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center website.

Also posted on both of these websites, you will find a copy of the Federal Register notice which was published on February 21, 2008 that announced the grant competition and provides guidance on how to apply for the grant. Those websites also include the application package which is in a PDF form, and instructions on how to complete and submit the application for consideration. Please note, again, that the closing date for submitting an application is March 31, 2008.

Also there is a list of dates and times for the remaining dial-in conference calls. You're welcome to participate in those as you go through the competition process and application process if you have additional questions or concerns that you would like to address that was not addressed during this call.

We will now open the lines for any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this competition.

Operator:	Ladies and gentlemen, once again, if you have a question at this time, please press the 1 key on your touchtone telephone. Our first question comes from Ms. -- .
Caller:	Yes. My question is, do we need to provide letters of support?
Sharon Burton:	That is not a requirement. However, it is always helpful to have that information if you are going to be partnering with a variety of different partners for the grant competition.
Caller:	Thank you.
Sharon Burton:	And while we have the opportunity, I will just review who is eligible to apply for this grant competition. All eligible applicants under this competition include the following: A state education agency in partnership with one or more local education agencies; a state education agency, or SEA, in partnership with one or more LEAs, local education agencies and nonprofit organizations or entities, and that includes an institution of higher education; an LEA or consortium of LEAs; and finally an LEA in partnership with one or more nonprofit organizations or entities including an institution of higher education. Please note that you must be a state education agency or a local education agency to be the fiscal recipient of grant funds. Is there another question?
Operator:	Ms. Burton, I'm not showing any further questions at this time. We did just get a question from Ms. -- .
Caller :	I have lots of questions. This one is more to do with the narrative itself. If we place tables within our narrative, do those tables need to be double spaced, or can they be single spaced?

Sharon Burton: It depends on how you are going to be submitting this information. Are you going to go through grants.gov?

Caller: Yes.

Sharon Burton: Okay. I would double check with grants.gov. If you have the information in the application package, I would look over the information about submitting your application online which starts on page 3, and it goes through page 6 I believe -- page 7, thank you. It's page 7. I also would call the Help Desk if you have any questions about that. I know in the past we've had questions about tables and not being able to get that formatted right, and a lot has to do with the system that you're submitting that information in. I would give them a call just to let them know that you plan to include tables in your application, the system that you're planning to use, and what might be some tips that they can provide to you about how to do that so that it's formatted right once we receive it.

Caller: Okay. Thank you.

Operator: Once again, ladies and gentlemen, if you have a question at this time, please press the 1 key on your touchtone telephone.

Sharon Burton: I just wanted to remind you that we do have Dr. Warner on the line, so if you have any questions in relation to the Competitive Preference Priority which focuses on the use of rigorous, scientifically-based research methods for evaluation, she is available this evening to talk with you about that, or if you have any specific questions about that.

Let me also remind you while we have a few moments that one of the main priorities that you must meet for this grant competition is what we call the Absolute Priority. We have one Absolute Priority, and that states that the programs that you are applying for funds for must be designed and implemented for character education programs that are able to be integrated into classroom instruction and consistent with state academic content standards, and carried out in conjunction with other education reform efforts. If you do not meet that Absolute Priority, your application will not be eligible for further review for the competition.

Are there any other questions?

Operator: Ma'am, I'm not showing any further questions at this time.

Sharon Burton: I do want to remind you of the estimated range of awards and the number of awards that we will be making off of this competition. It is estimated that a total of two new awards will be made under the competition. The estimated range of awards for state education agencies in $500,000 to $750,000 for each twelve-month period. For local education agencies, the estimated range of awards is $250,000 to $500,000 for each twelve-month period. SEAs, state education agencies, must propose a total budget that is $500,000 or more for a single budget period. This restriction does not apply to applications from local education agencies. Please note that these figures are only estimates and do not bind the Department of Education to a specific number of grants.

The other thing I do want to share with you as you prepare your application is meeting what we call GPRA, which is the Government Performance and Results Act. Recently that has changed for this particular grant program. It had remained the same for the last

few years, but it has changed this year, so please take a look at that. In the application package it's found on page 17, and I'm going to share that with you.

As just a little bit of background, GPRA is what we call the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which is designed to address problems identified by Congress which focuses on performance data that can be used by federal agencies, such as the Department of Education, to improve program efficiency and effectiveness in the grant programs. This is very important information that we use and collect to assure that federal funds are being spent and that programs are actually showing some results.

As required by GPRA, the Department of Education has developed a strategic plan that reflects our organizational priorities, and each grant program is assigned what we call a GPRA measure. For this competition it has changed, and the measures for the program now are (1) the percentage of character education projects that use what we call an experimental or quasi-experimental design for their evaluation, and (2) the percentage of character education projects that use an experimental or quasi-experimental design for their evaluation that are conducted successfully and that yield scientifically-valid results.

So we ask that as a applicant that you give careful consideration to these measures in developing your project, and particularly how you will collect and report the data for these measures.

Is there any questions?

Operator:	Ms. -- , your line is open.
Caller:	Thank you. I was reading page 14, and am I to understand correctly that we do not have to indicate which evaluator that we use for this proposal, but if awarded, then we would go out for bid per se with various contractors?
Sharon Burton:	Yes. If you look on that information, there is a dollar amount that is listed for exceptions. But, generally, all grantees are encouraged to use their local or state procurement procedures in identifying any service that you plan to contract under this grant.
	Did you have any other questions, Ms. -- ?
Caller:	Yes, I did.
Sharon Burton:	Okay.
Caller:	On page 60 it says, under number 5, "Appendices. In addition please attach your signed program-specific Assurance form to this section." I didn't know what form that was referring to.
Sharon Burton:	You said on page 60, 6-0?
Caller:	Uh-huh. It's talking about grants.gov submission under "Other Attachments," and I didn't know what the signed program-specific Assurance form was.
Sharon Burton:	Yeah, I would actually look at -- if you get a printed copy of the application, it will have in its Appendices all of the forms that are referenced in grants.gov. That would give you a sense of what you needed to do. I believe the Assurance, yes, they do require a

	signature. A lot of times when you submit on grants.gov, and I don't know if anything has changed or not and if they allow for electronic signatures, you have to fax that information in to the program office.
Caller:	Okay.
Sharon Burton:	I'm told that the forms are online as well on grants.gov.
Caller:	Okay.
Sharon Burton:	Did you have any other questions?
Caller:	Not at this moment, no.
Sharon Burton:	Are there any other questions?
Operator:	I'm not showing anybody else in the queue at this time.
Sharon Burton:	Okay. I'm reminded that there is a 25-page limit on the application. Particularly if you choose to apply for the Competitive Preference Priority, you need to make sure that information that you have is going to be within that 25-page limit. So just make sure as you answer the questions that you keep in mind the page limit for this competition, which is 25 pages.
	Also, speaking of the application process, I just wanted to make sure that you knew that in the application package, particularly those of you who are going to be using grants.gov, there is a lot of information under what we call Frequency Asked Questions that can address everything from software issues in bringing up information onto grants.gov, to there is also information about how the Freedom of Information Act affects your application. If you plan to address the Competitive Preference Priority, there is information regarding issues such as human subjects research activities, start date of the grant, and other information that you'll find very helpful as you prepare your application.
	Towards the end of those Q&As there is a lot of good information regarding registering for grants.gov, and that includes make sure that you have a DUNS number that is entered into the system, and that you meet all of the different requirements as far as software and that sort of thing.
	Dr. Warner, did you have any comments or anything that you -- actually, I'd like to ask if you could speak to the Competitive Preference area, or on some of the research designs that's listed?
Elizabeth Warner:	Sure. I can mention a few things. I almost chimed in when the questions was asked about the evaluator. It seems to me as though even if you are going to quote a competition for the evaluator after you receive the grant, it might be useful to include what sort of criteria you would use in that competition to sort of display the kind of expertise that you intend to be hiring as a result of trying to take advantage of all the points you can get from the Competitive Priority.
	Also, I've actually read a lot of the Competitive Priority grants in the past for the evaluation section, and there are a few things, let me just lay out, that are useful to include in that. One, is to make sure that there is a very clear research question so that it's

easy to see what is going to be answered by the evaluation, so that then the design that's proposed is consistent with the research question and the kinds of data collection that are proposed are consistent with the research question. So in all of these things, the way that you can describe them to make it clear that there really is a research evaluation that's going to answer the questions credibly, that's the kind of thing that we're going to be looking for when we're actually trying to assess the priority points.

I don't know if that was helpful. Is there anything else you wanted me to cover, Sharon?

Sharon Burton: Could you just sort of go through some of the definitions as far as the different designs, not in detail, but just to give people just some reinforcement of the kinds of designs that will be considered for extra points under this priority?

Elizabeth Warner: Sure, and I'll try to do them in sort of an ordering of what are the most compelling, and that give us the highest confidence that the answers you're getting are --

Sharon Burton: Yes that will be fine.

Elizabeth Warner: So the strongest design is an experimental design or something that is called random assignment. Essentially, that's something that they use often times in medical research, where you are basically giving one group the treatment, another group doesn't get the treatment, and who gets assigned to the treatment is decided by lottery. So what that does, effectively, is it makes it so that on average the treatment in the controlled groups are the same, and the only difference is, is that one is getting the Character Ed Program. That's one design that you could use to then causally decide whether the Character Ed Program is effecting the kinds of outcomes that you wanted to try and effect.

Sometimes, depending upon whether you're doing the Character Ed Program in classrooms or as a whole school, it may be difficult to do random assignment, or you may want to give all groups the treatment. Then there are other possibilities like a quasi-experimental design, in which before the program is implemented you choose who is going to receive it. Then you look around to see if there is anybody else that looks kind of like that group, and you use data to try and make an assessment of getting other groups that are as close to that group as you can. That's going to be your comparison group. You're going to, as the end result, collect the same data from the treatment group and the comparison group, and that will give you at least suggestive or pretty strong evidence of whether the program is likely to be effecting the kinds of things that you're trying to effect or not. The better the matching of that comparison group, the stronger the design, but there are ways that you can just have other groups that are sort of benchmarks or close to the group. Those are often called quasi-experimental designs as well.

Another possibility is a regression discontinuity design. This is one in which perhaps a district is thinking of implementing this program in a number of eligible schools but not all of them, and so maybe there is sort of a rank ordering of who should be getting it. It's that ranking that's used in some statistical techniques to figure out whether the Character Ed Program actually made a difference for those who were above the ranking versus those who were below the ranking. So it's a treatment comparison kind of thing, but it's a special kind of technical way of going about it.

Then there's a few other ones that are listed in the grant. I'm not as familiar with them, but they're the kinds of things that are used in psychology or Special Ed kinds of things. Basically, these are either sort of a pre/post design where you're tracking what the

outcomes look like before you put the treatment in place, and then you look at the outcomes after the treatment is in place. That gives you a sense of is there anything happening that could be related to the fact that you put in your Character Ed Program?

Then there are variances on that theme, where you could try putting it in place, and then basically looking at the outcomes before you put it in place, after you put it in place, and maybe you'd take it away and use it for funding for some other schools, and then put it back in place. That's a treatment reversal kind of design. Or you can sort of vary how much time that goes on between putting the things in place versus not, and that's called a multiple base-line design.

Another thing that maybe is a little bit more doable with a Character Ed Program is called an interrupted time series, where you get several points of information. For example, if the Character Ed Program is trying to effect some academic outcomes or some attendance kind of outcomes, you might be able to get a time series, or a number of points before you put the Character Ed Program in place, and then looking at a number of time points afterwards to see whether things have improved.

So those are pretty much an overview of the various designs that are indicated in the grant competition

Sharon Burton: Thank you, Dr. Warner, for sharing that information. I also want to kind of give you a sense of how the review will be conducted, since if you choose to address the Competitive Preference Priority -- incidentally, if you do choose to address that priority, that needs to be indicated in your abstract. So please be clear that you are applying and would like to be considered for that Competitive Preference. We cannot just assume that if you have that design in there but you have not indicated that in your abstract.

The other thing I wanted to let you know is that because we have the Competitive Preference Priority, particularly those who have applied under this competition before, we will have two sets of reviews. The first one will be based on the four selection criteria that is outlined in the application package. I suggest that you read over that and make sure that you answered those questions as clearly as possible. If you choose the Competitive Preference Priority, there will be a second review. That's going to be based on the scores from the first review. That will be a panel of actually all evaluators that will actually look closely at your evaluation design in relation to what Dr. Warner has already mentioned, making sure that your research design and your project design are in sync. They're going to look at those types of things to see if it is, in fact, a strong evaluation design.

After that review, we will be able to rank those scores and be able to offer an award to the applicant. Again, there's going to be only two awards. I just wanted to remind you of that process. It's a little longer than usual because we have not had a Competitive Preference Priority for a few years. But since we do, if you choose to go for that, there will be a second review.

Also with the first review, just so you know, our reviewers are not Departmental employees or anyone associated with the Department. They are people in the field of character education, either in the program side or evaluation side, that will be reviewing your applications. That makes it as objective as possible. So we here don't make those decisions. It's your peers and other independent professionals that are in the field of

character education and related fields, such as social and emotional learning, that will be making those decisions.

Okay. Outside of Ms. -- , I know that there are some other people on the line. Is there any questions from anyone else, particularly questions that have not been addressed prior to this time?

Operator: You do have a question from Mr. -- .

Caller: Hello. I wanted to check and see what types of projects need IRB approval?

Sharon Burton: IRB approval, for those who may not know, is Internal Review Board. Those are projects, particularly if you are proposing to meet the Competitive Preference Priority, where you may be collecting data from students and others.

Elizabeth Warner: I mean, an IRB is usually to try and protect the integrity of the kind of data collection that you're doing. That's why it's associated with the evaluation efforts.

Sharon Burton: What would happen is that if your application is -- the application is actually forwarded to our Human Subjects Office. The Department's Human Subjects Officer will review the grant proposal, particularly the evaluation design, and they will contact you to let you know that the Department cannot clear the design until IRB approval is made or that a decision has been made by IRB regarding the evaluation design. So hopefully that answers his question.

Are there any other questions that have not been asked prior to this time that someone would like to ask? Okay. Well, hearing none, please be reminded that we have three more conference calls regarding this grant competition. The next one will be Tuesday, March 11th, and that call will begin at 9:00 a.m., and will be open until 10:30 a.m. Eastern Time. Then we have a call on March 19th, which begins at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Then we have our last call on Tuesday, March 25th, and that will begin at 11:00 a.m. in the morning.

Before we close, is there any other questions or concerns? Dr. Warner, I appreciate your participation in the call.

Elizabeth Warner: Happy to do it.

Sharon Burton: Any other questions?

Operator: Ms. --'s line is open.

Caller: Yes, we are applying on behalf of our state educational agency, and I was wondering if it would be a beneficial use of funding to provide subgrant competitions for local LEAs, or if you're looking for something different?

Sharon Burton: Well, let me ask one question. You said you're applying on behalf of your SEA. Are you a nonprofit, or are you a grant-writing --

Caller: Well, the SEA would be the fiscal agent, and I'm just then contracted to write the proposal.

Sharon Burton: Okay. We do not allow for subgranting to local education agencies as a part of this competition. Now, if you are providing services in technical assistance -- if the SEA is doing that to those LEAs, that's fine. But subgranting is not something that we allow under this program.

Caller: Okay. Thank you, very much.

Sharon Burton: Okay. Any other questions? Hearing none, thank you for participating on this call. If you have any other additional questions or concerns that were not addressed on this conference call, again, we have three more calls coming up on March 11th, March 19th, and March 25th. You're also welcome to email me at sharon(s-h-a-r-o-n).burton(b-u-r-t-o-n)@ed.gov. Again, the answers and transcripts from this call will be posted on those websites that we indicated earlier, which is the CETAC website, and the Department website under the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools in the next couple of days.

Thank you for your participation, and best of luck to you during the application process. Thanks.