

Partnership in Character Education Project Program
Moderator: Betsy Warner/Sharon Burton
February 13, 2009
3:00 PM ET

Operator: Good days, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Partnerships in Character Education Program conference call. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. Later, we will conduct a question-and-answer session and instructions will be given at that time. If anyone should require assistance during the conference, you may press *, then 0, on your touch-tone telephone to reach an operator. I would now like to introduce our host for today's conference, Ms. Sharon Burton. Ma'am, please begin.

Sharon Burton: Okay, thank you. Hello, everyone, and thank you for participating in this call. This is the call for the Partnerships in Character Education competition with the Office of Safe and Drug-free Schools at the US Department of Education. My name is Sharon Burton and I am the competition manager and project officer for the Partnerships in Character Education Program, or I will be using the acronyms PCEP during the call, and that refers to that program.

Again, the purpose of this call is to provide some guidance for the application process to apply for the PCEP grant competition. I will focus much of the call on some of the frequently asked questions for the competition and then I will have Elizabeth Warner, from our Institute of Education Science at the US Department of Education, to provide some guidance for the evaluation design portion of the selection criteria, especially to those who are interested in applying for the competitive preference priority. And then we will open the call for questions.

The purpose of the grant competition is to provide funds to eligible entities to assist them in designing and implementing character education programs that teach students elements of character such as caring, civic virtues and citizenship, justice and fairness, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, giving, or any other elements deemed appropriate by the eligible entity.

The character education programs supported will be programs that can be integrated into classroom instruction -- and what we mean by that is that it's not a standalone program, an after-school program, or something that is separate from the day-to-day classroom activities but is actually integrated into some, if not all, of the different topics that are taught in K-12 schools.

It's consistent with state academic content standards, can be carried out with the cooperation of parents, students, students with disabilities, including those with mental or physical disabilities, and other members of the community in the design and implementation of the program.

Now, the biggest question that I keep getting is eligible applicants. The eligible applicants, under this grant competition, include the following -- a state education agency, or SEA, in partnership with one or more LEAs, which are local educational agencies; a state education agency in partnership with one or more LEAs and nonprofit organization or entities, including an institution of higher education, another LEA, or a consortium of LEAs; or 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.

And when it says "in partnership with," we're talking about that the state education agency or the local education agency is the lead applicant. The nonprofit, the partnered organization, whether it's an institution of higher education -- and that does include two-year colleges -- cannot be the lead applicant. It would have to be the local education agency or the state education agency. If it's a consortium of LEAs, there still has to be one LEA that's designated as the lead applicant for the program, with the understanding that it is a consortium of other LEAs.

So a nonprofit organization cannot serve as the lead applicant, nor as the fiscal agent, nor can an institution of higher education or anything that is not considered an LEA or an SEA.

And I just wanted to share with you the definition that we use at the Department on what an LEA and an SEA is. A local educational agency, LEA, is defined as (a) a public board of education or public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control of, or direction of, or to perform service functions for, public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state; or such combination of school districts or counties in a state recognized as an administrative agency for its public elementary or secondary schools. I know a lot of regional education agencies in different states, such as Georgia, for example, may apply as an LEA. And that last part of that definition kind of applies to that kind of entity.

It is also any public institution or agency that has administrative control and direction of a public elementary or secondary school.

It is an elementary school or secondary school funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but only to the extent that including the school makes the school eligible for programs which specific eligibility is not provided to the school in another provision of law and the school does not have a student population that is smaller than under this Act, with the smaller student population, except that the school shall not be subject to the jurisdiction of any state education agency other than the Bureau of Indian Affairs, education services agencies and consortia of those agencies, and the state education agency in a state in which the state education agency is the sole educational agency for all public schools. You may find this, let's say, with the District of Columbia or Hawaii.

State Education Agency, SEA, is defined as the state board of education or other agency or office primarily responsible for the supervision of public elementary and secondary schools in a state. In the absence of this office or agency, it is a office or agency designated by the government of state law. So a lot of times we get questions, "Well, I'm a higher education agency; aren't I considered a state education agency?" And as you can see with that definition, we're talking about the state board of education or an agency that's responsible for the supervision of public elementary, K-12, and secondary schools in the state. So just to make sure that that is clear.

Now, just a couple of frequently asked questions regarding the application, because there's still some confusion in some areas. Many people ask if they can submit an application on behalf of my local school. And the application submitted by an individual school will not be considered unless it meets the definition of a local education agency under state law. So if that individual school is not considered an LEA, a local education agency, they cannot apply on behalf of their school. They would have to work through their district and have that district apply for the funding on their behalf or work with them and other schools within that district to apply through the local education agency.

Again, a common question. Nonprofit organizations -- are they eligible to apply for this grant? Nonprofit or community-based organizations are generally not considered SEAs or LEAs and thus are not eligible for this grant. Only the entities that meet the definition of one of these entities may receive funding under this program. Again, an LEA or an SEA in partnership with a nonprofit is eligible to apply. However, the LEA or SEA would serve as the fiscal agent for the grant.

Again, with colleges and universities -- we talked about that. They are not eligible to apply but they can partner with an LEA or an SEA. But the LEA and SEA, again, would have to be the lead applicant.

Are charter schools eligible for this program? Yes, charter schools that are considered local education agencies under state law are eligible to apply for funding under this program. And we do check that. So make sure that you are considered a local education agency before you apply. Don't think that we will assume that you are, because we do-- before we forward the applications for review, we will check those types of things to make sure that you are eligible. We will check with your state department of education to see if you are listed as an LEA for your state.

Now, what steps can you take to maximize your chances of receiving a grant? I always tell people, please read the application package carefully and completely. A lot of your questions can just be answered through reading the application package. If you are uncertain about any aspects of the application, please contact the competition manager, which is myself, for grant competition clarification.

Absolute priorities establish the parameters of the application under which the grant is competed. If your application does not meet the absolute priority or additional funding requirements for this grant competition, it will not be considered for funding. When we receive the applications, we do look for making sure that the application is from an eligible applicant. We also look at if they have addressed the absolute priority. And those are like the two key areas.

If you have not addressed either one of those, if you're, let's say, a nonprofit and apply, you automatically will receive notification from us that your application was not considered because it was ineligible.

If you do not clearly address the absolutely priority -- and one would think that that's sort of a given, but there are so many applications we do receive that sort of allude to the absolute priority, but do not specifically speak to it, and how the grant proposal is addressing it. So I do encourage you to make sure that your absolute priority statement or your reference to that is as clear as possible. We shouldn't have to guess that it is going to be integrated into the school curriculum. You need to be able to say that clearly, and how that's going to happen.

A panel of three persons from the character education and related fields, as well expertise in program evaluation, will review your application. Do what you can to organize your application clearly, provide requested information in a comprehensive manner, and respond to each selection criterion thoroughly. Again, as I mentioned for the screening process, reviewers are not permitted to give you “the benefit of the doubt.” Therefore, if information is not in your application, you won’t get points for it.

So again, if you’re not addressing things clearly and concisely where you can clearly see that you have addressed the particular criteria, that’s going to go against you when the applications are sent out for review. And if the reviewers can’t find it -- and being a panel manager, where I talk with the three reviewers and we go over the applications and they score them -- many times they’ll say, “I can’t find where they address this.”

I know you have a 25-page limit, but it has been done. (Laughs) People have been able to get all that information within a 25-page limit, so make sure that you have someone review that information thoroughly and make sure that if you are somebody from the outside and you’re trying to see if they have that information, that you can find it fairly quickly.

Be sure your application includes a budget request, an ED Form 524, and complete narrative justification for each of the proposed project years. Now, if you’ve been downloading the application package, it may not have that ED Form 524 form along with that information. If you’re not able to find it, just go to the website, the Department’s website, which is www.ed.gov, and look for Grants and Contracts, and then look for Forms. Or do a search for forms. And a page should come up that will have all of the pertinent application forms, including the ED Form 524, which needs to be a part of that application.

Now, a few people had some questions about the budget section and that there was some language in the application package that said to reflect the 18-month budget, and it’s your understanding this is a four-year grant. Please, please construct your budget based on four years. Please ignore that 18-month language -- I don’t know how it got in there. But that’s not what it is; it’s a four-year grant -- if you choose to go four years; some people go three. But if you choose to be funded for four years, make sure that your budget reflects that and make sure that there is a complete narrative justifying all of your budget items.

We shouldn’t have to guess what something is; something should not appear in the budget, for example, that is not part of your narrative as far as addressing a selection criteria or part of a budget narrative. We want to see why you’re proposing a certain amount and why that budget category is there.

And you must transmit your application, if you plan to do it through grants.gov, on or before the deadline of February 24.

Now, one of the other questions that’s been raised is there’s language there in the application package regarding contracting for services. It does state that “applicants should not include information in their grant applications about specific contractors that may be used to provide services or goods for the proposed project if a grant is awarded.”

And some people have asked-- because in the legislative language and particularly in the language that refers to the competitive preference priority in proposing a quasi-experimental or experimental design, there’s language that talks about being specific

about your evaluator, particularly if you're going for an outside evaluator that you say in the contract.

The one thing-- that language is basically put there because we want to encourage all of the entities that apply to go through your bidding process or your procurement process in securing these kinds of contracts. In the past, we've had people that were proposed but then were not used when they got awarded or other issues that have arisen.

Now, if it's a program that you're looking at, maybe a specific curriculum or what have you, and that character education resource is truly unique and generally only available through one sole resource, and you know that's going to work for your population, for your proposal, then the application can state the specific name of the resource that will be used. If it's a resource available through a variety of vendors, then your application needs to state that full and open competition will be followed in the final selection of a vendor if a grant is received. And that goes for your evaluation contractors as well as program curriculum if you choose to work through an organization to provide that for your grant.

Are you required to respond to the competitive preference priority? It's optional. You do, however, have the option of receiving up to 20 extra points if you have an application that meets the competitive preference priority, which focuses on an evidence-based evaluation design. And again, Dr. Warner will be talking a little bit about that, just to give you some basic guidance on that. But it is optional; you do not have to apply for it. But it is-- it does give you up to an extra 20 points, depending on how well that particular design is presented.

How much money we have for the grant program -- we have an estimated amount of \$1,277,480 for FY 2009 for this competition. And yes, people are, like, "It's really just going to be two awards?" Yes, it is. We do estimate about two awards will be made from this competition. I've had questions -- "Well, you know, the appropriation is much more than that; how come it's just two applications you're awarding?" We do have current grants that we're obligated to fund through the end of their four-year cycle, so when you look at the budget, you have to break it down and realize that there are other grants that need to continue to be funded through the end of their cycle. So just because you see one amount does not mean that all of that is just new money for new grants. It is not. It goes to older grants that we are already funding.

What's the average amount for each grant? State education projects will be funded for approximately \$500,000 to \$750,000 for each 12-month budget period. Local education agencies will be funded for approximately \$250,000 to \$500,000 for each 12-month period.

Now, state education agencies must submit a proposed budget of not less than \$500,000 for each budgeted period or will not be considered. If you have a budget that is hitting \$457,000, you may not be considered. So you need to look at what you need, and an average state is going to need at least \$500,000 to use per year for their grant program. So just want to give you that heads up.

It's not a requirement for LEAs, and these are only estimates and do not bind US Department of Education to a specific number of grants or amount of any award.

There's no matching requirement for the grant program.

I've had a couple of questions about the indirect cost rate. An indirect cost is an expense that you incur that is necessary to implement the grant, but it may be difficult to identify

directly with your grant. For example, indirect costs may include money spent for heat, light, rent, telephone, security, accounting, and Internet use. If your organization prefers to use all of its grants funds for direct project costs, you are not required to charge the grant for indirect costs.

Now, if you choose to, you can. But you must have a negotiated indirect cost rate with a federal agency, and most likely the Department of Education or some other federal agency may have already negotiated that with your district or state. If you're an LEA, specifically, you may have an indirect rate that's provided by your state educational agency that might be used for the grant. And in all cases, I would check with your finance office to see if your state has a rate, what that is, and make sure that you include documentation of what that rate is because we will follow up with that if you are selected for an award.

We talked about the project and budget periods. The project period is up to 48 months, of which no more than 12 months may be used for planning and program design. Typically, that's the first year. You can use that first year for planning and program design.

What should you use as a start date? You probably want to be as flexible as possible, but I have just sort of advised people, just based on the way competitions run, probably a start date of July 1 through June 30 is probably going to be your best bet. I know some people say, "Well, that's not along our academic year." But it's based on when the funding is available, when the competition ends, and when we can make the award.

Specific areas, grant activities, for which outside sources can be contracted. Some example of grant activities that can be conducted by outside resources under contract as part of your grant can include evaluating the program, developing secular curricula, teacher training and other activities related to character education, and integrating character education into the curricula and teaching methods of the schools.

The deadline for applications under this grant competition is February 24, 2009. As far as getting an extension of the deadline date, waivers for individual applications failing to meet the deadline will not be granted regardless of circumstances. Under very extraordinary circumstances, the Department may change the closing date for a grant competition. When this occurs, the Department announces such a change in a notice published in the Federal Register. And we would provide that information on our website under the Character Education program or at our technical assistance website if that occurred and would provide the appropriate link to the Federal Register notice that would let you know about that.

Now, I just wanted to provide information, just sort of a review of what the priorities are under this competition. There's one absolute priority and one competitive preference priority. And again, the absolute priority is the one priority that you must have in your application or it will not be considered for review.

The priority is that the program design-- the design and implementation of character education programs are able to be integrated into classroom instruction consistent with state academic content standards and carried out in conjunction with other education reform efforts.

Again, the competitive preference priority is an optional priority, but we do give competitive preference to applicants that address the following priority, and that is that we award up to an additional 20 points to an application depending on how well the application meets the priority. And that is, the Secretary establishes a priority for projects

proposing an evaluation plan that is based on rigorous scientifically based research methods used to assess the effectiveness of a particular intervention. The Secretary intends that this priority will allow program participants and the Department to determine whether the project produces meaningful effects on student achievement or teacher performance.

And again, we'll talk a little bit about that with Dr. Warner, who will be speaking after I complete this section of our call. But again, that review-- just to give you some information, you will be reviewed based on four selection criteria, and then those applications that have the highest scores from that initial review will be forwarded on to another peer review that will look just solely on your evaluation design, if you apply for the competitive preference priority. So just want to mention that.

There's also an invitational priority. And that's the inclusion of faith-based and community organizations. The Secretary is interested in applications that propose to engage faith-based and community organizations in the planning and development of character education programs and the delivery of services under this program. However, we do not give an application that meets the invitational priority a competitive or absolute preference over other applications. So there's no points included if you choose not to partner with a faith-based or community organization. It does not affect your application in its scoring in any kind of way. So just wanted to give you that information.

Then we go into the four selection criteria, and then also want to address the GPRA measure, and then I'll turn it over to Dr. Warner. There are four selection criteria. If you have your application package, that is found on pages 24 through 26. I'm not going to go into all of them specifically, but just wanted to cover what the major selection criteria are.

The first one is the quality of the project design, which is 30 points. And we're looking at what your goals and objectives and outcomes are -- are they clear? Measurable? Designed for implementing and evaluating the project? And how it's designed to build capacity and yield results.

The second criteria is the quality of the management plan, and your total possible points for that is 25. We're looking at how the management plan, or how your project design, is going to be carried out. Is there a timeline? Is there a budget that goes along with that timeline? Are there some clear defined responsibilities between the applicant and its contractors, and who's responsible for what? When do you expect to have major milestones to occur? How is the community, particularly parents, teachers, and others that are involved with the school community, will be involved with the implementation of the grant?

The third area of selection criteria is the quality of project personnel. The total possible points on that is 15. We're looking to make sure that the qualifications of who you have to run the grant -- the project director and key staff -- include relevant training and experience. And also that there is some effort to ensure that diverse populations are represented in the staffing, particularly traditionally underrepresented populations based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

And then finally, the fourth criteria is the quality of project evaluation. We look at what your proposed methods of evaluation are, the extent to which the methods will provide some performance feedback, and if the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies that may be replicable in other studies in the future.

So there are some areas, sub-areas, under each of those criteria, and there is a point value on those, so I encourage you to really make sure that you review that information and that when you respond to them, that you respond to them as concisely, and as appropriate, so that when the reviewers look through that and try to match what you say based on the selection criteria, that you have addressed those different areas.

The last thing I wanted to mention before I turn it over to Dr. Warner is the Government Performance and Results Act, which is what we call GPRA. This is an act that was made in 1993 and it's designed to address problems identified by Congress, particularly the lack of performance data that can be used by federal program managers to improve program efficiency and effectiveness. This is information that Congress can use to ensure that spending decisions and oversight are informed by information about program performance.

We ask, and we encourage you, to make sure that in your application, among all the other stuff you've got to put in there, (chuckles) is to make sure that you address the GPRA measure for this. And in the application package, it's found on page 17. And that states that first, the percentage of character education projects that use an experimental or quasi-experimental design for the evaluation; and two, 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.

That's basically it. I do want to share two websites with you to make sure that you have that. These are some areas that you may want to visit for additional information. I do get inquiries about people that want to get a sense of what other LEAs and SEAs have been funded to do in the past. And we do have that information on line. I think the only thing that may not be included in those applications -- or proposals, rather -- is personnel information as far as specific resumes and that sort of thing of staff members, and budget information. If you want the whole kit and caboodle, you're going to have to submit a FOIA request, Freedom of Information Act, and you may or may not get that. Well, you won't get it; I'll tell you. You will not be able to receive it prior to the end date.

So I encourage people-- your best bet is just to take a look a what's on line. And you can get that at the Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center website, and that can be found at www.cetac.org. That is our technical assistance website for our grantees. It does have information and proposals on line that you can download and print out on successful applicants from the last few grant competitions.

And also on that website, you can download the application for this competition or you can visit the Safe and Drug-free Schools website, which is part of the Department's website, which is www.ed.gov/osdfs. And look under Character Education and Applicant Information and you can download it that way. I know a few people have said that they've had trouble downloading the application; I'm not sure where you-all are going. But you should be able to pull that information, it's either in a pdf form or Word document. You will be able to download it. And again, make sure that the forms that you need are on there with that downloadable application. If not, look on the Department's website and do a search for forms and then you can download those forms from the website and make sure that they're part of the application package if you plan to send your application in.

Okay. What I'm going to do now is have my good friend Dr. Elizabeth Warner, who's with us, and has been on these calls for-- the last two years, is it, Dr. Warner?

Betsy Warner:

Three years.

Sharon Burton: Three years. And she's going to provide just some basic information for those of you who are particularly looking to address the competitive preference priority for some guidance on what you may need to make sure that you have included in that portion of your proposal.

Betsy Warner: Okay. As Sharon said, I'll just go through some suggestions of what you might want to include if you do choose the evaluation competitive priority.

First of all, you want to have an evaluation section that you are very clearly stating what is your evaluation question. What are you going to answer, or address, as a result of conducting an evaluation?

Then you want to actually spell out what kind of design you're going to use. Is it a random assignment study? Is it a regression discontinuity design? Are you using a matched comparison that's--? Whatever you're using, you need to actually say exactly what it is and that it's linked to the research question that you've already stated, so that they actually match up and it makes sense -- that it could be addressing that research question

You should include enough information about how you're going to do that planned design so that it is clear to the reviewer that you not only understand what a random assignment study is but that when you execute it, it actually will end up being a random assignment study, or it will end up being a matched comparison. And there are lots of-- you can do it pretty briefly, but you do need to provide enough information so that one can assess that it's going to be a quality matched comparison design, or it's going to be a quality random assignment study.

And then, you want to spell out exactly what data collection you're going to incorporate. Again, it's got to be that the data collection is going to feed back into the design and is going to end up making it so that you'll answer the research question that you stated so it's all pulling together for the reviewer that yes, that evaluation's going to address that question in a rigorous, credible way, and that's the right kind of data collection that ought to go with it. And that data collection is actually plausible for them to be able to carry out.

And finally, it only comes together if you've got an evaluator that is going to actually be able to carry this out. So you want to make sure that you spell out enough information about the expertise and the prior experience that this person has so that it's clear to the reviewer that everything will go according to plan.

I guess in addition-- I'm not sure; you'll have to tell me, Sharon. But if we know-- I think we see the budget, or whoever reviews these would see the budget for the evaluation, so you would want to make it so that the budget actually makes sense, both in terms of the size of the program that's being evaluated that so it's not disproportionate, but that the activity that you're proposing could credibly be with those kinds of dollars.

Sharon Burton: Yes, for the most part, for the second review, when there is a review of those that have addressed the competitive preference priority and are sent for second review, the budget is not really part of the formal review. However, they do look at that and they are allowed to make a comment or two. I know last year, some of them did make comments about, "Really? They're going to do all this with this amount of money?"

So make sure that it is reasonable and that it works for what you're proposing because that does have some impact. It doesn't have total impact as far as your design is concerned, as far as scoring, but from an administrative point of view, we will be looking at that. And in some cases, that may have to be adjusted. So just keep that in mind. And that's a great suggestion, Dr. Warner.

- Betsy Warner: I think that was all I was going to say, except when you talk about the design, there are some designs that are more rigorous than others. And I also assume that the competitive priority points, there's-- from zero to 20 is what you can get, so the more rigorous the design-- But it has to be credible and that sort of thing. That's what's going to get the maximum points.
- Sharon Burton: All right. And thank you, Dr. Warner, for being on the call. And she'll be on the call through our question-and-answer session if you have some questions regarding that. And Operator, I think we are ready to open the line formally for questions.
- Operator: All right. Ladies and gentlemen, if you have a question at this time, please press the 1 key on your touch-tone telephone. If your question has been answered or if you wish to remove yourself from the queue, you may press the # key. Our first question comes from the line of Caller 1. Your line is open.
- Caller 1: Yes, thank you. I have two questions. Would you discuss exactly what is considered human subjects research and what would be involved in those requirements? And then I have a follow-up question related to another matter.
- Sharon Burton: Dr. Warner, do you want to take that one?
- Betsy Warner: I think we'll need to share it. But basically, whenever you do surveys of individuals -- teachers, students -- it's subject to the human subjects provisions. And basically you have to have an additional review board look at things to make sure that you're asking reasonable things that are consistent with the evaluation things that you need to include -- basically, to protect the privacy and reasonableness of these evaluations.
- Caller 1: So any surveys of any individuals would be subject to that regulation?
- Betsy Warner: I believe so, but Sharon-- (Inaudible) the human subjects office of the Department?
- Sharon Burton: Yes. One of two things. Do you plan to address the competitive preference priority?
- Caller 1: Yes.
- Sharon Burton: Okay. And if you are, yes, you definitely would need to consider the IRB review. What happens is -- let's say that you are selected for funding. We forward your application to our Office on Human Subjects. Jeff Rodamore [ph], who serves in that capacity, will read over your application and if he feels that it is an evaluation design, and particularly the instruments and the kinds of information that you plan to collect as part of your evaluation design may require Human Subjects' approval, he will contact you directly with a copy to me and state that that's an IRB approval, and what we call a federal-wide assurance is needed before you can implement the evaluation design.
- He usually gives you, I think, something like 60 or 90 days to do it. Most of the time, you need longer; and we're flexible about that.

Your evaluator, whoever you work with, should be able to help you with that process -- everything from identifying an internal review board -- that's the IRB -- to submitting the materials for the review and helping you get that review approved for your district to do the evaluation design.

Now, if you are deemed to have the human subject IRB approval and what they call federal-wide assurance, you cannot enact any part of that evaluation design until that approval and those assurances are completed. Once you do that, you contact us. Most people just will fax or send me the approval letter from the IRB board and then we double-check your federal-wide assurance, and that's usually on line. And then we give you the green light to go forward with your evaluation.

Caller 1: Okay. So just to confirm, at this point we do not need to complete any of the IRB-related activities.

Sharon Burton: Not prior to the application; or, not prior to the award. It only happens once the award is made. You do have a conditional-- as part of your grant award notification, you would get language saying that if we do find that this needs to be-- that your design needs IRB approval, that you will take care of that as a condition of your award. And, again, you would get official notification from the Department if we feel that you need to get that taken care of before implementing the evaluation design. So no, you don't need to that during the proposal application process.

Caller 1: All right; thank you very much. And then, I just have one other question regarding the budget. Are expenditures for food and refreshment and type of things for community meetings -- are those allowable? And are there any other red flag types of expenses that are not allowable?

Sharon Burton: Budgeting for food is something that the federal government frowns on, so I would avoid that at all costs. Maybe look for some in-kind kinds of resources if you plan to do that. And I think that's basically it; I would avoid including food costs in your budget.

Caller 1: Okay, thanks. And I'm sorry -- I just thought of one more question, then I'll quit hogging the floor here.

Sharon Burton: That's okay.

Caller 1: If we want to use a particular science-based curriculum, do the science-based curricula need to be ones that you provide or do you have a particular one anything you use and would recommend?

Sharon Burton: No, we do not recommend any curriculum or any kind of program for school districts; that's entirely up to the school district or the state departments of education as to what they feel is best for their students. So no, we don't make those kinds of recommendations.

We do have, through IES, the What Works Clearinghouse. And some people use that as a resource and we did do a review of character education programs and there was an assessment made on what may be considered promising. But by no means are they recommended programs from the Department.

Caller 1: Okay; thank you very much.

Sharon Burton: You're welcome.

Operator: Our next question is from the line of Caller 2. Your line is open, sir.

Caller 2: Hi, how you doing? I'm calling from the University of Connecticut, so we're-- I'm the professor here and teaming up with a team of LEAs and so forth, and I'm looking for some clarification on the indirect cost. As you probably know, universities like to take a big chunk of that, as much as 50-- I think the rate now here is 53%. But I've told them-- I've met with my grant people and I said, "Look, much of this research is off site."

And you mentioned earlier that it's a negotiated-- whatever you've negotiated with the institution. Well, it turns out we have several negotiated rates with the feds -- the high one being 52. There's one that specifies that it's off campus; that rate's about 30%. And then there's one that if it's considered a training grant, it's only 8%.

Now, the grant we're preparing is part training. We're going to be-- obviously, we're designing a curriculum, are going to be implementing it at six to 10 high schools using classrooms as the unit of analysis. And so much of it's happening out in the schools and involves training teachers. My finance guy looked at it and said that there was some language at the bottom of that 75-page call that made it-- used some of the language that was close to being a training grant.

So I guess my short question is, is this considered a training grant by you guys? Or, how are you characterizing it?

Sharon Burton: Well, it's a program grant. And as far as training, it depends on the design of the program that the LEAs that you're working with are hoping to achieve, or what they're trying to propose. But we don't see it as anything more than a character education program grant.

Now, as far as the indirect costs and everything, that's something that you're going to have to work out with the LEAs that you're looking to be contracted with. That's not something that you would negotiate with us, because the funds are not coming to you directly. So you need to work that out as part of your contract with the LEAs as far as providing services. And I don't know much more-- what other guidance, in that process, that needs to happen. But that would be something that's part of your over-all contract with them to provide services as part of the grant.

Caller 2: Okay. Can I ask one more question about research design?

Sharon Burton: Sure.

Caller 2: I would like to do a random-- a true experiment design. Right now I'm doing a quasi-experimental, where we've matched schools. But this is definitely going to be the classroom as a unit of analysis. My question is this -- with respect to making for a strong research design, is it possible-- we're going to be working with about 10 different high schools -- urban, private, charter. And what I'd like to do is, within the school we're going to have a pool of teachers that are going to participate in this.

And I want to randomize by one of two ways. Ideally, I think, for controlling for teachers' effects, it would be saying, I get teachers and then we randomly select one of their classrooms as the classroom that's getting the treatment -- or, the program -- the integrated curricula. And the second as the control group. Of course, we'd have to control for grade level and even academic level of the course. But the idea would be, then, you've got a teacher who's teaching two or more sections of the same class, and then randomly assigning one of those to treatment, the other she doesn't integrate the material in, or he doesn't integrate material in.

Versus randomizing on the teachers and saying, "Okay, we've got 50 teachers at this high school and 25 are going to serve as the control and 25 are going to be the treatment." Any insights there as to what you think offers for a stronger design?

- Betsy Warner: I think you can do either. It's just that if you randomize blocking by a given teacher, you might worry about spillover effects, or contamination.
- Caller 2: Right. Yes, that's going to be the thing is getting them-- obviously, you have fidelity to the intervention in that intervention class and not-- But I also then worry about, no two teachers are alike. And if I worry about randomizing at the teacher level, because then-- Or taking-- I think at that point, I'd probably have to be moving more to a matched design, a matched comparison, right, to make sure that you're really controlling for years of experience, background, education-- So on and so forth.
- Betsy Warner: No, that just has to do with sample size. Both of those are-- you've got two discussions of randomly assigning by teachers; it's just different versions of it.
- Caller 2: Right. Well, that's the second issue, too, is we're going to be working in different types of schools, and I don't think we have enough-- we're going to have enough of a sample size to support kind of an HLM model because we only have a few private schools and a couple of charter schools that aren't very big, so there's not a lot of classrooms in there.
- So I kind of wondered about that. I mean, it could be a simple -- this is a pre-post design with random assignment and there is no-- we're not trying to control for type of school. Although I'd like to do some analysis on that, but I'm wondering, do I build that into the research design as a factor -- type of school as a factor? Or because I'm not going to have the power, do I not even really mention that?
- Betsy Warner: Well, a pre-post design is a much lower level of rigor. And if you were thinking about a mass comparison design, the power calculations are such that you usually need more sample with a matched comparison design than a random assignment design.
- Caller 2: Yes. Well, even with a random assignment, you guys probably-- you want pre and post, right? Or are you just there, you--?
- Betsy Warner: Well, it improves your precision; that's all.
- Caller 2: Yes. So I was planning on doing pre and post even with random assignment, and not a post only design just to make sure that we're looking at change scores.
- Betsy Warner: No, that's all right. I thought you were talking about basically a one-time interrupted time series as opposed to still having comparison (inaudible).
- Caller 2: Right. Okay; thank you very much for that.
- Betsy Warner: Thank you.
- Operator: Thank you. Our next question is from the line of Caller 3. Your line is open.
- Caller 3: Hi; nice to be able to talk with both of you. My question-- I'm an evaluator like your last caller. And my question is a little bit of clarity on whether the evaluator-- the evaluator must be chosen afterward unless-- did you say, Sharon, that there are certain unique characteristics and then they're put into the proposal?

Sharon Burton: What we encourage people, or districts and states, to do is to make sure that they're following their procurement guidelines for securing someone to provide that kind of service. So what we're saying is that if, for example, the total amount for contracting, say, with you to provide an evaluation service -- if that is well below, or below, their bidding or procurement guidelines, where they have to send out bids for the service, then they can name you. But we definitely want the applicant to be able to state that they're naming you because, for this kind of contract, they do not have to do a bid process.

Now, if it's within a threshold where they do, it's highly recommended that they do not mention specific names. In some cases, some applicants were able to get around that by saying maybe not the name but they just said all the qualifications of the person that they wanted -- "We want someone that has this amount of years of experience, that has worked with these types of--" You know, basically naming all of the person's resume but not name the person.

Caller 3: I understand.

Sharon Burton: That's why that contracting language is there because in many cases, districts and states were not following their procurement guidelines and then we get called about, "Well, I was mentioned but I didn't get it." Or, "I didn't know that this opportunity existed in my community," or whatever. So it's really to protect everybody involved, and to encourage applicants to follow their guidelines in that that is something that we expect once we make an award.

Caller 3: Of course. Thank you, that's very clarifying. Maybe I can ask one evaluation question, as the person who's at least going to be writing this section and helping with it. On the discussion that Jason was just having on matched controls, it looks like you made the comment that matched control designs often need more-- larger sample than a randomized control.

And do you have any advice on what you think, at the school level, the number of schools that make a reasonable randomized control trial in this kind of-- in this field, really? Where the interventions are oftentimes not only at the school level but also diffused throughout the school. And that really doesn't allow for randomized classroom design. If you feel like you must, given the intervention that the people I'm working with are planning -- they really want a school-wide intervention. Given that, what advice do you have about the number of schools?

Betsy Warner: Well, I think you have to do some power kinds-- There's a lot of "it depends" in there. It depends how strong the treatment is. It depends on what data you're collecting, whether you have a pre and a post measure--

Caller 3: Whether I have a what?

Betsy Warner: Measure them at baseline before you put in the treatment, and whether you get it afterwards. So there's, like, so many "it depends."

Caller 3: Yes, all right. Thank you.

Sharon Burton: Thank you.

Operator: Our next question is from the line of Caller 4. Your line is open.

Caller 4: Hi. We just want to make sure that we have clarification on our charter school. And we are a state-sponsored charter school, which is our LEA, and that we can apply for this grant.

Sharon Burton: When you say that you're a faith-sponsored charter school, can you explain that a little bit?

Caller 4: We wrote our grant and we-- in our state, you can either receive a charter under a school district and/or under the state, or under a college. So we just filed with the state; that's how we were approved to receive our charter. So in other words, I'm understanding that if we can apply for the grant, we would be the fiscal agent of our LEA, which is the state. Am I understanding that correctly?

Sharon Burton: Well, the state is the SEA. So what the state should have been able to do was to designate you as an LEA, as a charter school, if that's the policy in your State; I don't know what it is. If they consider you, once they chartered you, that you're your own local education agency, then yes, you can apply as an LEA for the program. So you need to make sure that the State considers you an LEA.

Caller 4: Well, I definitely called and I was under the understanding that they are the LEA and we would be the fiscal agent. We file under them, I guess.

Sharon Burton: Now, they say that they're an LEA?

Caller 4: Yes, they were very clear. The state is the LEA and we would be of an LEA. In other words, we would be the fiscal agent of this grant, I guess, if that's the wording that's you're using, to help me understand how we could write this grant. So I didn't know--

Sharon Burton: It sounds like you would be, but I think what would probably happen is that we would have to further investigate that with the state department of education. What you may want to do, though, is include in your application information from the State Department of Education that chartered you because there may be language in there that will give us a clue as to how they consider you in the state. And are you a faith-based charter school?

Caller 4: No, we're not.

Sharon Burton: Oh, okay.

Caller 4: We're a regular-- we are a K-5 charter school.

Sharon Burton: Okay. Most likely, you are, but I would include your charter information. And if you can, get some written documentation from the State Department of Education that would state what is your status -- if they consider you an LEA or not.

Caller 4: Well, we-- they said that-- again, they were clearly saying that they are the LEA. We, as a school in this state, any charter school is not their own LEA or SEA.

Sharon Burton: Okay. I would probably try to get whatever that is in writing and put that in your application, because what they may consider one thing or the other may be something else in reality; for us to take a look at. So I think I would err on making sure that -- "Well, can you put that in writing for me and fax that to me? I want to put this in my application, so they know what I am."

Caller 4: Okay. And I have the statute. Is it a possibility that I can e-mail you the one-paragraph statute?

Sharon Burton: Just put all that as part of your application package.

Caller 4: Okay, I'll do that. Thanks.

Sharon Burton: Thanks.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question is from the line of Caller 5. Your line is open.

Caller 5: Yes. I have a question about a parent program. We have an organization that works with single mothers and as a part of their program now, they try to provide for these mothers to go on retreats, and in those retreats they try to teach them skills of how to handle their children and, I guess, just life situations. And my question is, could we try to help them, or work with them to enhance their program and still provide maybe some more of these parents to go on these retreats to get some of this kind of training?

Sharon Burton: You're talking, like, proposal information, and I can't really get into that with you. You have to take a look at what it is that you want to have-- based on the selection criteria, what your end goal will be for a character education program. Is this part of the school district population? How does that work with what your over-all plan is for the character education program? Again, how that fits with what is the selection criteria. And make a decision as to whether this is a program that you want to have partnered with you.

Caller 5: Okay. And one other question is, if we go for the competitive priority, are the partner organizations part of the evaluation, or will we just stick with the school?

Sharon Burton: Again, it's depending on what your proposal and who your audience is. If your audience includes some of the partner organizations, they may be a part of that. If it's just the district or school population, they may not. So it depends on, again, what your outcomes are going to be and who's going to be involved as far as who the population is and what kind of outcomes you want to see with that population, and how the evaluation plan will address that.

Caller 5: And what our question would be -- our research question. Okay, thank you.

Sharon Burton: You're welcome.

Caller 5: That's all.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question is from the line of Caller 6. Your line is open.

Mary Hillman: Hi; thank you for taking my call. If we are unable to address the competitive preference, do you feel it behooves us to apply?

Sharon Burton: I'm sorry, I didn't get your question.

Caller 6: If we are unable to address the-- or, if we're not planning to address the competitive preference, does it still behoove us to apply?

Sharon Burton: That's something that you'll have to make a decision on. Again, the competitive preference is optional so it's just up to you as the applicant if you decide not to do that,

how you feel that might impact your chances of getting a grant. And that's not something I can tell you.

- Caller 6: Do you feel you'll have many, many applicants for the two awards?
- Sharon Burton: I think we're going to have more than last time, which is really interesting, because I've gotten so much more calls than I did last year at this time. But you never know; it just depends. Some people get interested and at the last minute decide they're not going to do it. It's really hard to say; it's not something that we can-- We don't ask for a letter of intent as part of this program, so you just don't know.
- Caller 6: Just the last follow-up -- how many applicants did you have last year?
- Sharon Burton: We received around 35 applications. The year before that, when we had about 39 grants that we were awarding, we had about 235 applicants. So it can go either way.
- Caller 6: Yes; thank you.
- Operator: Again, if you have a question, press the 1 key on your touch-tone telephone. We have a question on the line from Caller 7. Your line is open.
- Caller 7: Hi, thank you. My question is whether there are specific formatting requirements for narrative sections of the grant.
- Sharon Burton: If you-- are you planning to submit a paper application or are you going through grants.gov?
- Caller 7: We could do either. We're in the process of getting on grants.gov.
- Sharon Burton: Okay. Grants.gov has some specific directions; it's included in your application package. But if you have some formatting questions or are not sure about some things, I would call their help desk for specific information. But if you download the application package, there's some information in that that addresses some of that.
- Caller 7: Okay, thank you.
- Sharon Burton: Yes.
- Operator: Again, if you have a question, press the 1 key. I see no further questions in queue.
- Sharon Burton: All right. Well, being that there's no further questions, we appreciate you being a part of this call. We wish you all the best in applying for the grant program. Again, February 24 is your drop-dead deadline. And if you have any additional questions that, for whatever reason, were not addressed (a) in the application package -- and you need to download that and read that thoroughly to make sure, because a lot of times your question is already answered -- And (2) was not addressed during this call, please contact me. We will have a transcript of this call posted on the Department's website and I believe will be on the CETAC, the technical assistance, website, if you-- probably within a week or so -- if you need to refer to some of the information that was shared during the call.

Thank you Dr. Warner, once again, for participating with us.

Operator:

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your participation in today's conference. This does conclude the program; you may all disconnect. Everyone, have a great afternoon and a great weekend.