Funding Opportunity: ED Announces Education Innovation and Research Program (EIR) Early-Phase Award Competition

Lewis-Burke Associates LLC – July 29, 2021

The U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) Office of Elementary and Secondary Education released, on July 27, a notice inviting applications (NIA) for the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Education Innovation and Research (EIR) for Early-Phase program grants. The EIR program supports efforts to create, implement, and evaluate innovative, evidence-based solutions to academic challenges facing high-need students. The EIR program has three tracks: Early-Phase, Mid-Phase, and Expansion. Each track requires a different level of prior evidence of effectiveness and level of scale. Higher education institutions may apply as part of a consortium led by a state education agency (SEA), local education agency (LEA), the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), or as a non-profit organization recognized under 34 CFR 75.71. ED intends to issue a total of $180 million in awards across all three phases of EIR grants with $4 million as the estimated average size of an award.

Proposals must demonstrate an evidence base that justifies exploration into the topic and focus on field-initiated innovations. The FY 2021 Early-Phase grant competition includes a special focus on K-12 STEM and computer science education, as well as expanding opportunities in computer science for underserved populations such as minorities, girls, and youth from rural communities and low-income families. For the Early-Phase competition, ED intends to award an estimated $35 million in funds for STEM projects and $35 million in funds for social and emotional learning (SEL) projects.

The NIA for the Early-Phase program grant includes four absolute priorities and three competitive priorities. All applicants must address Absolute Priority 1 and must also address one of the other three absolute priorities. Applicants who choose to address Absolute Priority 3 also have the option of addressing Competitive Priority 1, and applicants applying to any of the Absolute Priorities are able to address Competitive Priorities 2 or 3. There is no limit to how many Competitive Priorities applicants are able to address.

- **Absolute Priority 1**: Demonstrates a Rationale
  - Applicants should develop, implement, and test the feasibility of their projects and must submit prior evidence of effectiveness that meets the “demonstrates a rationale” evidence standard.

- **Absolute Priority 2**: Field-Initiated Innovations – General
  - Projects that are designed to create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field-initiated innovations to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students.

- **Absolute Priority 3**: Field-Initiated Innovations – Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM)
  - Projects that “create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale entrepreneurial, innovations to improve to student achievement for high need students” in STEM, or computer science.
Competitive Preference Priority 1 – Computer Science (up to 5 points): Within Absolute Priority 3, projects designed to improve student achievement, expand access to, and participation in computer science coursework for underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, and low-income individuals.

Absolute Priority 4: Field-Initiated Innovations — Fostering Knowledge and Promoting the Development of Skills That Prepare Students To Be Informed, Thoughtful, and Productive Individuals and Citizens

- Projects should “create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale” evidence-based innovations to improve student achievement for high-need students and promote SEL skills that improve academic performance and prepare students for responsible citizenship.

Within Absolute Priorities 2, 3, and 4, competitive preference is given to applications that address the following competitive preferences.

Competitive Preference Priority 2 — Innovative Approaches to Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Underserved Students and Educators (up to 5 points):

- Projects that are designed to address the needs of underserved students most impacted by COVID-19. Some examples of projects that develop and implement strategies to address those needs may include:
  - Providing evidence-based supports and educational opportunities to accelerate grade-level in-class student learning (especially for underserved students);
  - High-quality tutoring and other forms of expanded learning time;
  - Provision of targeted supports to prepare students for success in postsecondary education; and
  - Creating or supporting equitable and inclusive learning environments in schools.

Competitive Preference Priority 3 — Promoting Equity and Adequacy in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (up to 5 points):

- Projects that are designed to promote equity and adequacy in access to critical resources in Pre-K-12 for underserved students. Some examples of project activities that support this competitive priority are:
  - Addressing inequities of access to fully qualified teachers and improving their retention;
  - Increasing access to middle school courses that are foundational to success in high school, advanced high school coursework, high-quality early college programs, and high-quality career and technical education pathways; and
  - Developing programs designed to provide a well-rounded education.

Further details on requirements of the absolute and competitive priorities can be found in the Notice Inviting Applications.
Due Dates: Full proposals are due August 27, 2021. Applicants are encouraged to submit a notice of intent to apply by August 17, 2021.

Total Funding and Award Size: ED intends to award a total of up to $180 million in EIR grants across all phases of the program, funding up to $4 million for Early-Phase projects over a period of up to 60 months. Between 12 and 23 program grants are expected to be awarded in the Early-Phase track.

Eligibility and Limitations: SEAs, LEAs, non-profit organizations, and BIE are eligible to apply and may do so partnership with other entities, including higher education institutions. The grant requires cost sharing by recipients of at least 10 percent of the award amount.

Sources and Additional Information:
- More information regarding the FY 2021 competition, including the full solicitation for each funding track and informational materials, is available at https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/innovation-early-learning/education-innovation-and-research-eir/fy-2021-competition/.
- The EIR program website can be found at https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/innovation-early-learning/education-innovation-and-research-eir/.