

ORDE “KNOW YOUR AGENCY” SERIES: US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ED)

Agency Site: <https://www.ed.gov/>

OVERVIEW

Created in 1980 in its current form and signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, this Cabinet-level department originated in 1867 when President Andrew Jackson signed legislation to create the Department of Education to collect information about US schools. It was quickly demoted to an Office one year later upon concerns that the new Department would have too much control over local schools. Today, the agency mission is “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access”. In the 1860’s, the Office of Education had four employees and a budget of \$15,000 for its education fact-finding mission. Today’s ED has 4400 employees and a \$68 billion budget. (Source: About ED web page)

Approach to research mission

ED funding includes student loans and grants, formula grants and discretionary grants. Discretionary grants are awarded through competitive processes and are the ones typically available to University researchers. Eligible grant recipients for ED funding include institutions of higher education, local educational agencies, state educational agencies, small businesses, and non-profits. Congress generally sets applicant eligibility criteria within the program-authorizing legislation.

AGENCY ORGANIZATION

The Secretary of Education, a Presidential appointee confirmed by Congress, heads the Department. The Deputy Secretary serves as Chief Operations Officer and as Acting Secretary in the absence of the Secretary. There is also an Under Secretary with responsibilities for managing a variety of offices including postsecondary education with additional responsibilities for implementation of White House initiatives. ED is divided into eight Program Offices, five of which offer discretionary grant programs (asterisked) of interest to University researchers:

- [Federal Student Aid](#)
- [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)*](#)
- [Office for Civil Rights](#)
- [Office of Elementary and Secondary Education*](#)
- [Office of English Language Acquisition*](#)
- [Office of Postsecondary Education*](#)
- [Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services*](#)
- [Office of Career Technical and Adult Education](#)

AGENCY GRANTS PROCESS

Grant programs within ED are created by Congress through authorizing legislation, setting specifics such as funding availability, award ranges, and applicant eligibility. ED then has responsibility for establishing program regulations (e.g., how programs will be administered, grant criteria to be used). Grant opportunities are announced through the Federal Register and Grants.gov. Applications are electronically submitted, most via Grants.gov. ED offers a myriad of discretionary research grant and training programs such as the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Program, International Research and Studies, Special Education Personnel Development to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities, and institution-wide student outreach programs such as TRIO and Upward Bound.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) “is the primary research, evaluation, and statistics arm of the US Department of Education” (Source: Director’s Biennial Report to Congress, FY 2017 and 2018, p. 2). Created by Congress in 2002, IES’s mandate is to provide “unbiased, reliable, and useful information about the condition and progress of education in the United States” (Source: Director’s Biennial Report, p. 2). IES is charged with funding “scientifically valid research” which most often translates to randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Beyond RCTs, IES supports implementation of the Standards for Excellence in Education Research (SEER) principles based on best scientific research practices and proven interventions to advance student

outcomes. (Source: Director’s Biennial Report, p. 4 and p. 14). IES consists of four Centers, each headed by a Commissioner:

1. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance
2. National Center for Education Research
3. National Center for Education Statistics
4. National Center for Special Education Research

Go to <https://ies.gov/funding> for details about IES funding opportunities and instructional webinars.

The National Board for Education Sciences (NBES) provides oversight of IES – approving Institute priorities, advising on research areas to be supported, and recommending applications to be funded after peer review is complete. Its 15 voting members are Presidential appointees. Non-voting members include the National Science Foundation Director, and the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Awards/Success Rates

Specific to IES, for Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018, nearly 2000 applications were received. Of those, 1711 received external review and 255 grant awards were made, representing a 14.9% success rate. (Source: Director’s Biennial Report to Congress, p. 6)

Contact with Agency Program Staff:

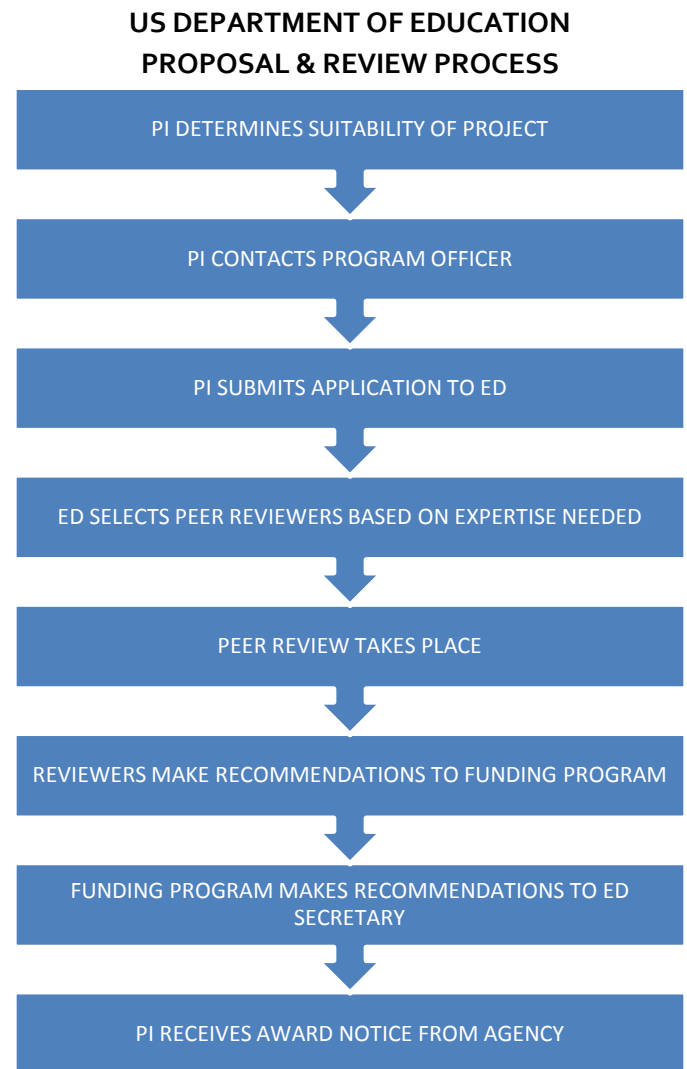
Program officers are listed in funding announcements and are available to answer principal investigators’ questions. Program officers are also the primary post-award contacts for principal investigators.

Typical Agency Proposal Process:

- 1) PI determines suitability of proposed project for ED program
- 2) PI contacts program officer for assistance and questions about application
- 3) PI submits application (usually via Grants.gov)
- 4) Peer review panel evaluates proposals and makes funding recommendations
- 5) Funding program makes award recommendations to ED Secretary
- 6) Successful PI receives award notice

Proposal Review Process:

ED uses peer review for announced funding opportunities. There are no standing review committees; qualified candidates apply to the Department and are selected to serve on panels based on subject expert need. Most reviews are conducted electronically with later panel discussions taking place via conference call. Reviewers provide comments, scores, and funding recommendations to the program. The program then forwards its funding recommendations to the ED Secretary.



What Happens Next?

Successful principal investigators receive funding award notices and then implement their proposed work. Those not selected for funding will receive written reviews, and can revise and resubmit when the program is offered next. Responding specifically to previous reviewer comments is generally not allowed for resubmissions.