

ALL INVESTING IN INNOVATION (I3) GRANTEES are required by the Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide for an independent program evaluation, carried out by someone other than the program developers or implementers. While program developers and implementers are required to coordinate their efforts with evaluators, the evaluation must be conducted by a third party to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest.

For more than 40 years, Education Northwest has worked with state and local partners in the region to conduct evaluations of educational programs. Experience has taught us some important lessons for effective proposal development that can be applied to i3 evaluation plans.

Here are some key considerations to keep in mind:

- Read through the i3 RFP carefully, as the evaluation requirements are extensive. For example, it is important to measure implementation as well as impact.
- Address the specific evaluation criteria for the type of i3 program that you are proposing. Below we describe the criteria for each of the Scale-Up, Validation, and Development Grants.
- Select an evaluator with experience in the type of evaluation you need. A portion of the points in the Management Plan and Personnel section are awarded based on the expertise and experience of the independent evaluator. In this document we list resources that help you locate evaluators.
- Discuss with your evaluator the existing evidence available to justify the potential of your proposed innovation and how it might be presented in the application.
- Work with your evaluator to develop a “logic model” of your program. This model should describe the context in which you are working, the key elements of the innovation, specific strategies that describe what you will do, evidence that describes impact, and the relationship among these variables.
- Bring the program developer, implementer, and evaluator together to identify the implications for the program of the evaluation design and methodology. For example, an innovation that is operating at the district level will have different requirements and constraints than an innovation around a specific curriculum in schools.
- Allocate sufficient resources for the evaluation. Keep in mind that this evaluation should not only help you determine whether the program “worked” but also provide information about how to improve the program’s operation and impact over time. Consider how the evaluation might help you address sustainability and scalability.
- Enlist an evaluator early in developing your proposal to maximize consistency of the description of the program, its implementation and impact, and evaluation. You will find that evaluators will ask questions that help you improve the design of your program, and thus the proposal as a whole.

Criteria for Scale-Up Grants

- The evaluation should use an experimental design if possible, and if not, a well-designed quasi-experimental study.
- The evaluation should be conducted of the innovation as implemented at scale.
- The evaluation should provide high-quality implementation data and performance feedback, and should permit periodic assessment of progress toward intended outcomes.

- The evaluation should provide sufficient information about the key elements of the innovation so it can be replicated in other settings.
- There should be sufficient resources allocated for a successful evaluation.
- The evaluation should be rigorous and conducted by an evaluator who is not the developer or implementer of the program.

Criteria for Validation Grants

- The evaluation should use a well-designed experimental or quasi-experimental study.
- The evaluation should provide high-quality implementation data and performance feedback, and should permit periodic assessment of progress toward intended outcomes.
- The evaluation should provide sufficient information about the key elements of the innovation so it can be replicated in other settings.

- There should be sufficient resources allocated for a successful evaluation.
- The evaluation should be rigorous and conducted by an evaluator who is not the developer or implementer of the program.

Criteria for Development Grants

- The evaluation should use methods appropriate to the size and scope of the proposed project.
- The evaluation should provide high-quality implementation data and performance feedback, and should permit periodic assessment of progress toward intended outcomes.

- The evaluation should provide sufficient information about the key elements of the innovation so it can be replicated in other settings.
- There should be sufficient resources allocated for a successful evaluation.

Resources to help you think about high-quality evaluations

There are many complex issues involved in designing and conducting the rigorous evaluations required for i3 projects. The i3 RFP recommends that eligible applicants review these technical assistance resources on evaluation:

- What Works Clearinghouse Procedures and Standards Handbook (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/references/idocviewer/doc.aspx?docid=19&tocid=1>)
- IES/NCEE Technical Methods papers (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/tech_methods/)

The following are also useful overviews of scientifically based evaluation designs:

- Schneider, B., Carnoy, M., Kilpatrick, J., Schmidt, W.H., & Shavelson, R.J. (2007). *Estimating causal effects using experimental and observational designs* [White paper]. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association. Retrieved from www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Books/Estimating_Causal_Effects/ECE_Front-TOC.pdf
- Shadish, W.R., Cook, T.D., & Campbell, D.T. (2002). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- The online Research Methods Knowledge Base provides explanations of commonly used terms and methods in social science evaluation. (www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.php)

Resources to help locate and select a high-quality evaluator

A number of registries list researchers who conduct program evaluation. In addition, you may be able to find a qualified evaluator at your local college or university. Given the complex nature of the evaluations required by the i3 RFP, be sure to select an evaluator who has the training and experience to successfully design and conduct the evaluation you need. At minimum, the evaluator should be familiar with the Program Evaluation Standards from the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. Further, the evaluator should be able to explain how the evaluation will help you improve your program over time, and position it to be scaled-up and sustained.

- American Evaluation Association (www.eval.org/find_an_evaluator/evaluator_search.asp)
- What Works Clearinghouse Registry of Evaluation Researchers (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/references/registries/EVLSearch.aspx>)

Ask Us

Feel free to contact Education Northwest if you have further questions about the evaluation requirements for i3 grants or how to identify a high-quality evaluator to meet your needs. Contact Bob Rayborn, 800.547.6339, ext. 587 or Bob.Rayborn@educationnorthwest.org.



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About Education Northwest

Founded in 1966 as Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Education Northwest works with schools, districts, and communities on comprehensive, research-based solutions to the challenges they face. For more information, please visit educationnorthwest.org.