IL-EMPOWER Peer Learning Partners
Frequently Asked Questions re: the Application Process

Who can apply to be an IL-EMPOWER Learning Partner?
• The ESSA State Plan provides for four designations. Underperforming designations are assigned to commendable schools with one or more underperforming student group. Lowest performing schools have a summative index score for all students in the bottom 5 percent. The underperforming and lowest performing designated schools receive additional Title I funds to increase student achievement. As an exemplary or commendable school, you are able to apply to be an approved Peer Learning Partner with IL-EMPOWER and assist underperforming and/or lowest performing schools with increasing student achievement.

What is the vision for the Peer Learning Partner initiative?
• The vision for peer learning partners is born from the belief ISBE holds that some of the best professional learning a school can participate in, is when working alongside a peer. Peer Learning Partners have demonstrated success with the implementation of a proven and effective practice.
• A Peer Learning Partner is an exemplary or commendable school which is approved by ISBE through the application process. The title Learning Partner is given to an external vendor that has been approved by ISBE through the RFSP application process.
• The Peer Learning Partner initiative is being created by ISBE as an additional learning partner option under IL-EMPOWER. As we launch this new endeavor, ISBE welcomes your feedback moving forward. Please send feedback to Allison Sherman, Exec. Director for IL-EMPOWER at asherman@isbe.net.

When are applications due? When will I hear if my school(s) have been approved?
• Final deadline for submitting application: January 25, 5:00 p.m.
• An email from ISBE confirming receipt of application will be sent to the contact person on the application during the week of January 28
• Indication of formal approval: Mid to late March, 2019
• ISBE will be scheduling more information webinars for Peer Learning Partners who are formally approved. These webinars will take place throughout this spring.

How is ISBE evaluating my application?
• ISBE will be using a rubric to evaluate applications for approval. The rubric is currently under design and should be finalized in upcoming weeks. The rubric will contain criteria that evaluates responses to application questions, as well as a school’s performance within the ESSA Accountability success indicators.
Do I sign a contract with ISBE? How do I contract for services with the requesting school district?

- Peer Learning Partners do not sign a contract with ISBE. ISBE’s role is to provide a structure and system for Peer Learning Partners to pair with schools seeking improvement services.
- A Peer Learning Partner and the school seeking services will design an Intergovernmental Agreement (or IGA) for services to be rendered. This agreement is designed and implemented by both agreeable district parties. ISBE will not collect or approve these IGAs, but both partnering districts should keep them on hand in the case ISBE makes a request to review.

When and how will I find out if I am approved?

- An email will be sent directly to the contact person listed on the application. Applicants will hear about their pending approval mid to late March. We are pleased to have over 100 interested district applicants at this time.

When should I expect to get started working with a school?

- We expect most schools will be researching potential peer learning partners late this spring and summer. We hope services may commence as soon as the summer in order to prepare staff for implementation next school year.

Who do I contact if I have any questions related to my application or the role of a peer learning partner?

- Please send all questions to Allison Sherman, Exec. Director of IL-EMPOWER at asherman@isbe.net or contact the IL-EMPOWER School Support Hotline at 312-814-1088.

If I become an approved peer learning partner, how will districts know I am available for services?

- Approved Peer Learning Partners will be listed on the IL-EMPOWER webpage. Once approved, Peer Learning Partners will be guided by IL-EMPOWER staff to share information with ISBE to post on the webpage for interested schools to view.

If I become an approved peer learning partner, will I need to produce any reports for ISBE?

- ISBE would like to know whether Peer Learning Partner Services are meeting the needs of our improvement schools and supporting them in their growth.
- We have not yet developed an assessment of services provided by our peer partners, but when we do, we will provide more guidance at that time, and we may request your input into the design of this assessment.

If I am a school in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), how do I apply?

- CPS is an approved IL-EMPOWER Learning Partner via our Round 1 RFSP application process. They were awarded a contract with ISBE for all three IL-EMPOWER service areas – Governance & Management, Curriculum & Instruction, Climate & Culture.
- We are currently working with CPS administration to determine the Peer Learning Partner process for schools in the district. Please contact Tabatha Koylass (tkoylass@cps.edu) if you are a CPS school interested in applying to be a Peer Learning Partner and more guidance will be given.
How do I determine a blended hourly rate?

- We are asking districts to develop a blended rate to produce a simple hourly cost for services to share with schools across the state. Instead of a learning partner listing out each individual expense, we will have one cost, or blended rate, provided – which is expected to include all of the expenses a school or district will incur to provide their services. An example is listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hourly Rate</th>
<th>Est Hours</th>
<th>Total Est Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person A $100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person B $150</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$750.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Expenses $50.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies $25.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Est Cost</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,825.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Please note: When a learning partner is prepared to “contract” with another school, they may find the need to make minor adjustments to costs, depending upon how the learning partner and school customize the activities. For instance, travel costs may be a district’s greatest variable. An actual cost later for travel may be greater than the amount assumed in the original blended rate. Therefore, a peer learning partner may need to make minor adjustments to their blended rate when they are settling on an agreement with a partnering school.

- A blended rate gives schools across the state (those northerly and southernmost) a strong determination of learning partner costs for services in order for them to make an appropriate selection of a peer learning partner from our IL-EMPOWER partner list.
How will lowest and underperforming schools be funded by the state to support their work with a Peer Learning Partner?

- Funding to support schools within the IL EMPOWER improvement process is provided through the Title I School Improvement 1003(a) federal grant. The funds are designated for supplemental school improvement activities. Schools utilizing funds to enter into an agreement with a peer learning partner must adhere to Title 1 allowable expense guidelines.

What is the Illinois Quality Framework (IQF)?

- Use of the Quality Framework and Supporting Rubric is a requirement for schools accepting IL-EMPOWER school improvement funds. All exemplary and commendable schools in Illinois are also encouraged to complete the IQF Supporting Rubric and can have access to it by signing up in IWAS.

- The Illinois Quality Framework is a set of seven standards with multiple indicators. The standards are outcomes-based, and provide guidance for a balanced accountability measure to monitor progress and growth across clearly established targets. No one standard is enough to bring about significant school improvement – they overlap and support each other to address the many influences that impact children across their experience within the school system. Embedding this framework in the school improvement process enables a systemic approach to improvement.

- Peer Learning Partner applicants should describe in their application a plan for implementing and coordinating school improvement activities aligned to the framework standards. More information about the IQF can be found at: https://www.isbe.net/Pages/illinois-quality-framework.aspx as well as in the Peer Learning Partner application webinar found on the IL-EMPOWER webpage.