Illinois State Board of Education

State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)
Illinois RtI Network RFP Bidders' Conference Questions & Answers

Please Note: If a topic has no questions and answers posted under it, this means that no questions about that topic have yet been received from interested applicants. Questions should be submitted by email to rtirfp@isbe.net. Responses will be posted in this document within two business days of receipt of each question.

CORRECTION
On page 8 of the RFP, a correction has been made in the paragraph that begins "During project implementation the I-RtI Network must also…." Specifically, in the bulleted items the references to SPDG Objectives 2 and 3 were reversed but have now been corrected, and the RFP has been reposted. This correction did not result in a change to the conditions of the RFP.

GENERAL INFORMATION
Eligible Applicants
1. Can special education joint agreements or school districts apply under the RFP?

   No. Only Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) and Intermediate Service Centers (ISCs) are eligible to submit an application and serve as an administrative agent (please see "Eligible Applicants" information on page 1 of the RFP). Special education joint agreements and public school districts are, however, required partners and must, therefore, be involved in any application submitted by an ROE or ISC. Please see Required Partnerships and Collaboration under "Program Specifications" on pages 7 and 8 of the RFP for details of the partnership requirements.

Application Deadline
1. Can proposals be postmarked, rather than received, on February 25, 2011, and still be on time?

   No, a February 25 postmark is not sufficient for a proposal submission to be deemed "on time." As stated on page 2 of the RFP, proposals must be received at ISBE on February 25. All mailed proposals must be received in the Springfield office by that date. See page 2 of the RFP for information about locations for hand-delivered proposals. Reminder: Be sure to submit the required number of copies—one original plus five copies (six applications in all)—plus two CDs containing the specified files.

PROGRAM SPECIFICATIONS
Required Partnerships and Collaboration
1. Can we agree to partner in only one grant application, or could we sign on as a partner in more than one?

There is nothing in the RFP that excludes an entity from agreeing to partner in more than one application.

2. The RFP identified institutes of higher education (IHEs) as required partners. Would partnering with the Board of Higher Education fulfill this requirement?

    While an applicant could include the Board of Higher Education as a partner, to meet the partnership requirements of the RFP, one or more individual Illinois IHEs must be identified as partners in the application. Also, given the requirement that the Illinois RtI Network work collaboratively with IHEs to support SPDG Project Objective 3 (Increase the number of undergraduate and graduate educator preparation programs at IHEs that implement RtI content in their curricula), it logically follows that the partnering IHE(s) should have educator preparation programs.

3. The RFP states that the I-RtI Network will be required to "work collaboratively with IHEs to support SPDG Project Objective 3 (refer to page 3), which involves incorporating RtI content into general and special education preservice and graduate curricula and delivery of training to IHE faculty." It also states that a separate RFP will be issued to an IHE to fund this work via the Illinois IHE Partnership. If the IHE Partnership hasn't been established yet, how will we know the specific IHEs with which we should partner?

    Meeting the requirement to partner with IHEs that is stated on page 7 of the RFP does not require knowledge of which IHE(s) will receive funding for the Illinois IHE Partnership. The purpose of requiring IHE partnerships in the I-RtI Network is to ensure that IHEs are involved in the work of the I-RtI Network, including membership on the Governing Board (see pages 7 and 8 of the RFP). These may or may not be the same IHE(s) that receive funding for the IHE Partnership.

4. Could you please clarify the expectations of the I-RtI Network in terms of working collaboratively with the Illinois PTIs [Parent Training and Information Centers] and with IHEs to support SPDG Project Objectives 2 and 3, respectively?

    With regard to SPDG Objective 2, ISBE will provide separate funding to the PTIs to disseminate materials and sponsor parent workshops on RtI. The I-RtI Network will be expected to work with the two Illinois PTIs to develop and/or refine parent informational and training materials and deliver training on RtI to parents. To that end, collaborative activities must, at a minimum, include providing I-RtI Network staff to (a) help develop content for parent informational materials and (b) develop content for and deliver parent training in multiple locations across the state.

    With regard to SPDG Project Objective 3, ISBE will issue an RFP to provide separate funding to a successful IHE applicant to implement the IHE Partnership (see ISBE's federal grant application at http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/html/grant_info.htm for further information). In turn, the I-RtI Network will be expected to work collaboratively with the IHE Partnership.

Collaborative activities must, at a minimum, include making I-RtI Network staff available to deliver training on RtI (using the ISBE modules) for IHE faculty, providing technical expertise to the IHE Partnership in critical RtI content for educator preparation courses, and facilitating partnerships between participating I-RtI Network districts and the IHE Partnership to increase the number of graduates employed in low-performing districts with high populations of students from low-income backgrounds.

5. Is there a recommended number of each type of required partner that an applicant should have?

   As stated on page 7 of the RFP, partners must include <u>multiple</u> local education agencies (LEAs), i.e., <u>one or more</u> public school districts, <u>one or more</u> special education joint agreements and cooperatives, and <u>one or more</u> ROEs and/or ISCs within <u>each</u> of the six ROE areas. Partners must also include one or more IHEs and parent entities. Thus, only minimum numbers are specified for each of the partner types.

   Given the statewide scope of the project, applicants are encouraged to establish a sufficient number of partnerships with each type of entity listed above in order to ensure representation of all regions of the state.

6. Does the Governing Board that is required by the RFP have legal authority over the I-RtI Network? For example, does the Governing Board have to approve/hire the Project Coordinator and staff? Does the Governing Board have to approve expenditures? Or is the board more advisory to the SPDG Project Director and the Project Coordinator?

   No, the Governing Board will not have "legal authority" over the I-RtI Network project. Only ISBE and the administrative agent will have such authority, with the administrative agent being directly accountable to ISBE. The Governing Board must, however, have a primary role in the implementation of the I-RtI Network, as delineated on pages 7 and 8 of the RFP, and the administrative agent, along with the Project Coordinator, will be required to provide regular reports to and solicit, consider, and respond to input from the Board.

   With regard to project staff, members of the Governing Board will play a role in <u>assisting</u> in the identification of potential project personnel and external coaches. They will, however, not have the authority to make hiring decisions. Rather, ISBE and the administrative agent will make decisions about hiring of qualified personnel to fill the Project Coordinator, Regional Evaluator, and Regional Coordinator positions, as well as other positions as determined appropriate.

   In terms of expenditures, the administrative agent and Project Coordinator for the I-RtI Network will likely be required to provide regular project expenditure reports to the Governing Board and seek members' input on the use of funds. Such input must be carefully considered and shared with ISBE for review to determine alignment with the project requirements. It is not anticipated that the Governing Board will have the authority to

approved or deny expenditures. Rather, ISBE and the administrative agent will hold such authority.

Project Personnel

1. Is there a minimum FTE requirement for the part-time regional coordinators and the part-time regional evaluator, e.g., .25 or .50 FTE?

    The RFP does not specify a minimum FTE (full-time equivalency) for the part-time regional coordinator and regional evaluator positions. The applicant must propose the FTE for these part-time positions and demonstrate that the proposed FTE will be sufficient to fulfill the associated responsibilities specified in the RFP.

2. Do we need to identify specific people who will fill the project personnel positions proposed in our grant application, or could those people be hired after the grant is awarded? To what extent does ISBE expect to play in selection and/or approval of personnel?

    Under item B (Project Personnel) of the Proposal Narrative Requirements on page 18 of the RFP, it says "List each person to potentially be employed and/or contracted with by name (if known)…." Therefore, it is not required that specific individuals whom the applicant proposes to hire to fill key project personnel positions be identified in the grant application. As further discussed under item B, at a minimum applicants must describe the staff and staffing patterns to be used in providing training, technical assistance, and coaching; list all proposed positions and associated responsibilities; and describe the qualifications individuals to be hired will be required to have. If specific individuals the applicant proposes to hire under the project are known at the time the application is submitted, then their names and details of their qualifications for a particular position should be provided (it is recommended that resumes or vitas be included in an attachment).

    In addition, we want to take this opportunity to reinforce the importance of equal opportunity/affirmative action in employment. As an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer, ISBE is committed to providing equity in employment and services, irrespective of gender, race, national origin, color, disability or age. Therefore, the administrative agent of the Illinois RtI Network will be required to seek applicants from underrepresented groups and to provide any special accommodations required for an applicant to participate in the application or interview process. Accommodations must also be made in the workplace to enable employees to perform their roles efficiently and effectively.

    Regarding ISBE's role in selection or approval of project personnel, if individuals are identified for particular positions in the grant proposal, we will review the qualifications of those individuals and take that information into consideration when awarding points during the proposal review and evaluation process. For any proposal selected for funding, we will also work closely with the successful applicant to ensure that all individuals hired for project positions are appropriately qualified. This will include participating in the interview process for the project coordinator, lead regional coordinator, and regional evaluator positions.

Professional Development, Technical Assistance and Coaching Plan
1.

Project Evaluation
1. Should the Project Evaluation Design be delineated on the Project Action Plan form or on the Evaluation Component Narrative form, or both?

Project evaluation should be addressed in both the Evaluation Narrative and the Project Action Plan. The Evaluation Narrative (Attachment 1, page 6) should be used to describe in detail the evaluation plan in a narrative format (see Proposal Format, item 5 (Evaluation Design) on page 16 of the RFP for further details). From this narrative, you should identify one or more key evaluation tasks for the evaluation objective, specific activities to accomplish each key task, and timelines for completing each activity. In turn, these key tasks, activities and timelines should be outlined in the Project Action Plan (Attachment 4).

2. Please clarify the roles of the I-RtI Network evaluation coordinator and the State external evaluator and how they will interact and support each other.

The external project evaluator will have primary responsibility for implementing the project evaluation plan (see Appendix G of the RFP), which will include development and/or refinement of project evaluation tools, development and/or refinement of the project evaluation platform/system through which data will be collected, analysis of project data, and preparation of project evaluation reports. The I-RtI Network evaluation coordinator will be responsible for working collaboratively with the external evaluator to finalize the evaluation tools and data platform/system and to ensure that evaluation activities are carried out at the regional and district levels, including the responsibilities listed in detail on pages 12 and 13 of the RFP.

3. Will the State external evaluator be responsible for developing an online data collection system and evaluation tools, or will that be the responsibility of the I-RtI Network grantee?

As stated above, the external evaluator will have primary responsibility for developing, executing, and maintaining the online data collection platform/system and development/refinement of evaluation tools. Keep in mind, though, that the I-RtI Network evaluation coordinator will be required to collaborate in these tasks and to oversee completion of evaluation activities at the regional and district levels, as outlined on pages 12 and 13 of the RFP.

Project Website
1.

Communication with ISBE
1.

FISCAL INFORMATION
1.

PROPOSAL FORMAT
Application Components
1. **Application Forms:** Is it permissible for an applicant to replicate the application forms in a Word document or an Excel file in order to complete the application?

    Provided the content and format are identical to those of the replicated form, it is permissible to replicate Attachments 2 – 4 in Word format and Attachments 5a and 5b in an Excel file. Any specified margin, font and spacing requirements and page limitations must be followed. Regarding Attachments 6 – 10, the PDF forms provided must be used and may not be replicated in another format.

2. **Budget Summary Breakdown:** On the budget breakdown forms, what is required related to the "detailed description of anticipated expenditures?" Is this simply listing each specific staff member, materials/supplies, equipment, stipends, or is there an expectation of a narrative budget justification?

    The budget breakdown page should clearly show how you have calculated the total amount of each line item. For example, if you propose to contract with a consultant for a total of $12,000, you would need to provide a breakdown using an hourly or daily rate (e.g., $300 per day X 40 days) to show how you arrived at the $12,000 total. If you propose to purchase equipment, you would need to specify the type of equipment and the corresponding cost for each unit (e.g., 3 laptop computers @ $700 each = $2,100). Although a budget narrative is not required, it can prove useful in justifying costs. If you complete a budge narrative, it should be included as an attachment to the proposal.

3. **Letters of Intent to Participate/Letters of Support:** On p. 18 of the RFP, it states we must attach a letter of intent from each participating entity. Is a "participating entity" (1) partners listed under C of Attachment 1, (2) all LEAs, regional providers, IHE, and parent entities interested in participating in the funded project, or (3) all named personnel/consultants to be employed by the grant?

    Participating entities include the partners that an applicant lists in the table under C on page 1 of Attachment 1 and any additional required partners not listed in that table but who have made a clear commitment to participate. Please review the list of required partners, which can be found under "Required Partnerships and Collaboration" on page 6 of the RFP. Letters

of support, rather than letters of intent to participate, may also be included from entities that are not specifically identified as a partner but wish to express support for the application.

Clarification: *All letters of intent to participate and letters of support should be submitted with the grant application as an attachment or appendix. Such letters should not be mailed separately to ISBE.*

Proposal Narrative Requirements
1. Does the 12-point font, double-spaced requirement for the narrative also apply to tables included within the narrative, or can they be formatted for best presentation?

    The 12-point font, double-spaced requirements apply to all parts of the narrative, including tables.

Other
1. Where can I find the appendix to the Illinois SPDG application? I have the link for the application itself. It mentions the Appendices in the document, but it's not included.

    The appendices for the Illinois SPDG application are not posted, as the ones considered relevant and necessary for responding to the RFP have been included as appendices of the RFP itself (in particular, see Appendices A, B, C, and E). Other appendices from the SPDG application were taken from documents readily available online, such as the Illinois State RtI Plan (http://www.isbe.net/pdf/rti_state_plan.pdf), the I-ASPIRE project evaluation tools (http://www.luc.edu/cseit/i-aspireresourcesforcoordinator.shtml), and Illinois State Advisory Council (ISAC) members (http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/pdfs/isac_members.pdf).