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Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) Application Overview

March 2010

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Scientific Learning's i3 Proposal Guide¹ March 2010

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¹ Information presented in this Guide is based on information from the i3 website. This Guide should not be considered a substitute for the information provided by the US Department of Education. All applicants to the i3 program should read the official information carefully. Should discrepancies occur, information in the Federal Register should be considered the correct information.

What is i3?

The *Investing in Innovation Fund*, known as i3, is a grant program developed by the US Department of Education as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act with \$650,000,000 in funding. The purpose of the i3 program is to:

“provide competitive grants to applicants with a record of improving student achievement and attainment in order to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices that are demonstrated to have an impact on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates.” (i3 Application)

This Guide is designed as an overview of the i3 Program to assist Scientific Learning Corporation customers in deciding if and how to apply. Refer to the i3 RFP (Request For Proposal), also called the Application Packet, for more details on the i3 program and the application process.

The RFP, Frequently Asked Questions, a summary of the program and additional information can be found at: www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation

What is the timeline?

i3 has several key dates to note:

- **April 1, 2010** – Intent to Apply – not required but strongly encouraged
- **May 11, 2010** – Application due by 4:30 pm Eastern Time
- **Late Spring/Early Summer** – Proposals reviewed
- **Early-Mid Summer** – Matching funds must be secured by those projects to be awarded funding
- **September 2010** – All funds awarded
- **2010 – 2015** – Funded projects may last 3 to 5 years

You are strongly encouraged to submit an intent to apply if you believe you meet the eligibility requirements and plan to submit a proposal for i3. This information will allow the Department of Education to create a more effective and efficient review process, and will allow for more adequate time for securing matching funds on the part of those projects identified for funding.

Who is eligible to receive i3 funds?

LEA = Local
Educational Agency

To apply for i3 funds, you must be one of the following:

- local educational agency (LEA)
- nonprofit organization in partnership with one or more LEAs
- nonprofit organization in partnership with a consortium of schools

LEAs include public schools and public school districts. Private schools, colleges and universities are not LEAs, but may be included in i3 projects as partners.

Non-profit organizations can include colleges and universities, afterschool program providers, and others. (See the i3 glossary and RFP.)

The Fiscal Agent for the funding is the LEA or nonprofit organization that applies for the funding.

Additional Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for i3 funding, projects must:

- **Maintain a Student Focus** – “implement practices, strategies, or programs for high-need students”
- **Demonstrate Historical Success** – provide evidence demonstrating your past success
 - For an LEA applying on its own, the LEA must have “(a) closed achievement gaps or significantly increased achievement for all groups of students, and (b) achieved significant improvement in other areas,” such as “graduation rates or increased recruitment and placement of high-quality teachers and principals, as demonstrated with meaningful data.”
 - For partnerships involving a non-profit organization, the nonprofit must have “a record of significantly improving student achievement, attainment, or retention through their record of work with an LEA or schools,” whether or not the LEA and school partners have a history of success.

Note: Without this history of success you will not be eligible to apply.

- **Address an Absolute Priority** – address one of the four absolute priorities listed on page 5 of this Guide
- **Partner with the Private Sector and Meet the Matching Requirement** – secure matching funds from the private sector equal to 20% of the funds sought prior to program start date, or request a reduced matching level (to be granted in rare situations)
- **Provide Evidence** – meet the evidence requirement of the type of grant for which you are applying (see types of grants and evidence requirements below).

Checklists for eligibility and definitions of the above can be found on the i3 website.

What will be funded under i3?

i3 is looking to fund projects based on several priorities within three types of projects, as described in detail in the RFP. At least one absolute priority must be met by each proposed project. It is anticipated that most projects involving Scientific Learning products and services will be Validation-type projects.

Types of Projects (Proposals must identify one of the following types):

- **Scale Up** – project designed to “scale up” practices, strategies, or programs for which there is strong evidence that the project will have a statistically significant effect in meeting the i3 goals. Scale-up projects are limited to \$50 million/project and should scale up to a state, regional or national level.
- **Validation** – project that shows promise, but for which there is currently only moderate evidence that it will have a statistically significant effect in meeting i3 goals. Validation projects may reach \$30 million/project and should scale up to a state or regional level.
- **Development** – project with high-potential and relatively untested practices, strategies, or programs whose efficacy should be systematically studied. Development projects range up to \$5 million and should be able to further develop and scale up.

Absolute Priorities (At least one required):

1. Innovations that Support Effective Teachers and Principals
2. Innovations that Improve the Use of Data
3. Innovations that Complement the Implementation of High Standards and High Quality Assessments
4. Innovations that Turn Around Persistently Low-performing Schools

Points = the basis for evaluating each proposal. Think of a rubric in a classroom – points are given for each criteria met. Those with the highest points will receive funding.

Competitive Preference Priorities (Extra points awarded for each):

5. Improve Early Learning Outcomes (particularly K-3)
6. Support College Access and Success
7. Address the Unique Needs of Students with Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students
8. Serve Schools in Rural LEAs

Examples of possible i3 projects from Scientific Learning:

- Scale-up – Successful use of Fast ForWord® in a group of districts or state is “scaled-up” by implementing its use nationally
- Validation – Promising success with Reading Assistant™ in a district is expanded to a larger region or state-wide to demonstrate broader effectiveness
- Development – A school collecting data on use of Fast ForWord expands its use district-wide and implements a stronger program to document effectiveness

What information do we need to compete for funds?

Application

The application package describes the documents you will need.

- **Abstract** – a one-page project abstract
- **Project Narrative** – the description of the project with rationale and strong arguments for why your project meets the i3 goals and should receive funding (50 page limit for Scale-Up, 35 page limit for Validation, and 25 page limit for Development)
- **Budget Narrative** – a detailed line-item budget and narrative explaining and justifying the budget
- **Appendix** – the various forms and certificates required for i3 applicants as described in the RFP (such as letters of support and resumes)

Selection Criteria

Within the project narrative, you will provide information addressing each of the selection criteria listed below. Begin gathering information as soon as possible. This information will be critical in writing your project narrative.

- **Need for project and quality of project design** – include data on your schools and students to establish need
- **Strength of research, significance of effect and magnitude of effect** – collect all research and evaluation results (see Evidence section below)
- **Experience of the eligible applicant** – include prior experience of all partners, demonstrate historical success, and provide evidence that partners are capable of successfully implementing the project.
- **Quality of the project evaluation** – identify your evaluator(s) and provide that person or group's qualification if possible (see Evaluation section below)
- **Strategy and capacity to bring to scale or to further develop and bring to scale** – include evidence that your schools, districts and partners have the capacity to successfully implement your project to the scale promised in your proposal
- **Sustainability** – provide evidence for your ability to continue the project and your successes after the i3 funding ends
- **Quality of the management plan and personnel** – include resumes and other information to demonstrate your expertise and the expertise of your partners

Follow all requirements:

Pay careful attention to the written documents provided and follow the most recent ones on the i3 website. Program details have changed and continue to change.

Evidence

When you read through the RFP or look at the resources from the US Department of Education online you will find a clear focus on evidence. If the following descriptions overwhelm you or you are unsure if your evidence meets the criteria, ask for help.

Be sure to identify the evidence available on your project **BEFORE** you determine the type of project (scale-up, validation and development). When reading the evidence criteria in the RFP, pay close attention to the words “or” and “and”. The following excerpts from the RFP can give you an overview; however, you should read the full explanation of evidence in the RFP before you draft your proposal.

Similar Settings and Participants: i3 reviewers will be looking for evidence from your own existing programs or from similar settings and participants. When using existing Scientific Learning research as evidence, use studies that closely match your proposed project, setting and participants as much as possible. Use evidence from your own programs when you can. <http://www.scilearn.com/results/scientifically-based-research>

Scale-up projects require strong evidence: evidence from previous studies whose designs can support causal conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity), and studies that in total include enough of the range of participants and settings to support scaling up to the State, regional, or national level (i.e., studies with high external validity, also referred to as generalizability). **Examples** include: (a) more than one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study (with control group) or quasi-experimental study (without control group) that supports the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program; or (b) one large, well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled, multisite trial that supports the effectiveness of the project.

Validation projects require moderate evidence: evidence from previous studies whose designs can support causal conclusions but have limited generalizability, or studies with high external validity but moderate internal validity. **Examples** of moderate evidence include: (a) at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental study supporting the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program, with small sample sizes or other conditions of implementation or analysis that limit generalizability; (b) at least one well-designed and well-implemented or quasi-experimental study that does not demonstrate equivalence between the intervention and comparison groups at program entry but that has no other major flaws related to internal validity; or (c) correlational research with strong statistical controls for selection bias and for discerning the influence of internal factors.

Development projects require reasonable hypotheses: evidence that the proposed practice, strategy, or program, or one similar to it, has been attempted previously, albeit on a limited scale or in a limited setting, and yielded promising results that suggest that more formal and systematic study is warranted. The proposal must provide a rationale for your project based on research findings or reasonable hypotheses. “Thus, applications for Development grants do not need to provide the same level of evidence to support the proposed project as is required for Validation or Scale-up grants.”

How do we apply for i3 funds?

Once you have decided to apply, you need to identify which partner will be the fiscal agent and lead applicant. This partner will submit the application on behalf of all other partners.

Planning Checklist:

- Download the application from the i3 website
- Review the application and all other available materials on i3
- Identify your partners
- Plan your project
- Contact Scientific Learning for resources as needed
- Identify your evidence
- Create your budget
- Locate matching funds
- Revise your project if necessary
- Write your proposal narrative (See Proposal section below)
- Write your budget and abstract
- Gather all additional required information listed in the application
- Submit your application online by 4:30 PM Washington DC time May 11

Applying Online

The Department of Education prefers applications be submitted online through the e-Application program described in the application packet. If your lead partner is not already a registered user on e-Grants, be sure to register as soon as possible. You will want to be ready early in case you have any trouble registering. If you cannot apply online, see the application for directions on submitting a paper application.

To Register in e-Application: “From the e-Grants Portal Page <http://e-grants.ed.gov/>, click on the continue button and click the register button on the right side of the next page. Select the e-Application module and click the next button. Please provide the requested information. Your e-Grants password will be sent to the e-mail address you provide. Once you receive the e-mail, enter your username and password and click the login button.”

What goes into the project narrative?

Your proposal must fit within the page limit for your type of project (50 for Scale-Up, 35 for Validation, or 25 for Development) as listed in the application packet. It must meet the formatting requirements outlined in the packet (margins, spacing, font size, etc.).

You can use this checklist in drafting your narrative; however, be sure you clearly address each selection criteria described in the application packet. Note, each type of project has different criteria. Information in the Scientific Learning i3 Grant Template can help you develop your narrative.

<http://www.scientificlearning.com/granttemplates>

Checklist

- Identify the type of project (scale-up, validation or developmental) in the first paragraph
- Identify in an opening paragraph the one absolute priority you will primarily address (if more than one, only list one as the focus in the beginning)
- Identify in an opening paragraph all competitive priorities, if any, you will address
- Need for the Project
- Project Design
- Research, Significance of Effect, and Magnitude of Effect
- Experience of the Eligible Applicant and Partners
- Project Evaluation
- Strategy and Capacity to Bring to Scale
- Plan for Sustainability
- Management Plan and Personnel
- Competitive Priorities (if any, describe in detail how addressed)

With thousands of applicants and only 5 scale-up, 100 validation and 100 development awards anticipated, you will want your proposal to stand out as a clear, strong rationale for funding. Be sure the project narrative contains everything needed to demonstrate the merit of your project. The budget narrative should demonstrate that you will have the resources to complete the project successfully, but should not be used to add information that didn't fit within the project narrative page limits. Reviewers may not read the budget information before scoring the project narrative.

Think of the project narrative as a term paper with a detailed scoring rubric and a stringent teacher giving the grade. Do everything you can to clearly describe your project so that teacher will give you an "A" (and the funding).

A Word About Budgets

Reviewers will examine your budget to see if you have identified and allocated funds for successful implementation and evaluation of your proposed project.

For example, if your project involves the implementation of Reading Assistant™ software school-wide in five elementary schools, have you included all costs associated with the site licenses for the software, hardware/workstations needed in each school, training and technical support, maintenance of the hardware, upgrades to software, and any additional project staff needed such as evaluators or researchers? Contact your Scientific Learning Account Manager for pricing on products, services, and support.

Matching Requirements

Before submitting your application for i3 funds, you should solicit your private sector partners for 20% in matching funds. Funds will need to be secured before the award can be granted. In-kind gifts are acceptable at current market rates if they come from non-federal funds. (If you know you will be unable to meet the matching requirement before you apply, see the RFP for information on exceptions to the matching.)

For example, if your budget is \$4 million for a development grant, the \$800,000 you need in matching funds could come from one local corporation that provides all the workstations for your schools, or a combination of direct funding from a local corporation and their staff's time calculated from staff payroll information.

Indirect Costs

Your organization may already have an indirect cost rate agreement approved by the Federal government. Check with your business office if you are not sure. This rate is calculated based on the organization's overhead and indirect costs, and is included in the budget as a percent of the funds requested.

Ranges of Funding

Each type of i3 project has a different anticipated range of funding, listed below in millions.

Funding Amounts	Development	Validation	Scale-up
Range up to	\$5	\$30	\$50
Average	\$3	\$17.5	\$30
Estimated number of awards	100	100	5

For example, a project estimated to cost \$4 million with an indirect cost rate of 40% would need to include \$1,600,000 in indirect costs in their budget. The resulting \$5.6 million request would be fine for a Validation project, but would exceed the \$5 million limit for a Development project. This same project would need an additional 20% in matching funds.

Where can we get help with the i3 application?

Depending on the nature of the help you need, the following options are available.

Where can we get help with the i3 application?

The i3 Team will provide assistance with the application process; however, they cannot give advice on the contents of your application or nature of your project.

Contact them at i3@ed.gov.

Where can we get help with Scientific Learning evidence?

Scientific Learning has results available from previous research and evaluation projects. Identify those most closely related to your own project, setting and participants by searching the research results on the Scientific Learning website:

<http://www.scilearn.com/results/scientifically-based-research/>

Remember, in addition to evidence from Scientific Learning, you need to demonstrate your own historic success at improving student achievement, attainment, or retention.

How can we get help with our proposal narrative and Scientific Learning products?

See the i3 Grant Template from Scientific Learning at www.scientificlearning.com/granttemplates. Contact Dr. Joseph Noble at www.scientificlearning.com/grantsupportrequest if you have further questions.

Where can we get help in learning about or obtaining pricing information for Scientific Learning products?

Contact your Scientific Learning Account Manager for information on specific products and pricing. (1-888-665-9707)

How can I find an Evaluator?

Finding the right independent evaluator for your project is critical. Check with universities and colleges in your area, particularly departments of education or evaluation studies for recommendations. Check with your state educational agency for potential evaluators. Ask colleagues in other organizations for references.

How can I find a grant-writer?

Writing federal grants can require specialized skills that go beyond the skills of your staff. The time involved in writing the proposal may be more than your staff can provide. If you need help, professional grant writers can write the proposal for you or take your draft and strengthen it.

Contact Dr. Joseph Noble at Scientific Learning for recommendations or search online through the American Grant Writer's Association (agwa.org).

Be aware that professional grant writers never accept compensation that is a percent of your grant funds or that is contingent upon your receipt of grant funds. Most grant writers are independent consultants that charge an hourly fee or a flat rate quoted for a project.

How and when will we know if we are funded?

If you receive high scores from reviewers, you will be contacted by the Department of Education. At that time, you will be given two to three weeks to:

- Provide names of all partners (LEAs, nonprofit organizations, private sector partners and your evaluators)
- Secure all matching funds, if you have not already done so. (Note: If you are unable to secure your matching funds within that timeframe, your application will be rejected.)

Once you provide the information, the review process will continue. You will be notified if you are selected for funding once the review process concludes, most likely in July.

All awards will be announced by September 2010. Projects should begin in Fall 2010.

What happens when we are funded?

Projects that receive federal funding must provide information to the Department of Education to assure them that our tax dollars are being well spent. This means you will need to:

- Provide financial reports, including details on matching funds
- Complete quarterly reports on project activities
- Provide evaluation results and evaluation data
- Participate in an evaluation of the entire i3 program
- Participate in, organize, or facilitate communities of practice

Community of Practice =
a group of i3 grantees that agrees to interact regularly to solve a persistent problem or improve practice in an area that is important to them

Each project must meet certain reporting requirements. Links to these are included in the official i3 application packet. Be sure you have the capacity to comply with requirements.

i3 offers **Technical Assistance** with the application process once the projects have begun!
See the i3 website or contact the i3 team at i3@ed.gov for help.

Good Luck!