



Mr. Patrick J. O'Donnell  
Clerk of the Legislature  
Room 2018  
State Capitol  
PO Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509

November 9, 2017

Dear Mr. O'Donnell,

In accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. §79-1054 (4), please find a report to the legislature on the Nebraska Innovation Grant Program and the progress of its five recipients in the first year. The Nebraska Department of Education is proud of the five innovators, and pleased to share the results with you.

The Department of Education Innovation Grant Fund and Innovation Grant Program were created with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 519, effective August 30, 2015. On October 20, 2016 the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) requested applications for grants through the Innovation Grant Program. This competitive grant program provides funding to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to support the development, expansion and investment in innovative best practices that improve:

- Education outcomes for early childhood, elementary, middle school or high school students;
- Transitions between any successive stages of education; or
- Transitions between education and the work force.

The Nebraska State Board of Education approved five applications on February 3, 2017 after a total of 18 applications were received by the NDE totaling \$17,692,476 in requests. The quality of the proposals and the approaches to innovation was inspirational and set the stage for high expectations in the development of evidence-based practices intended for dissemination and possible replication throughout the state of Nebraska.

The five recipients represent promising practices in improving student success in the state. One requirement of the grant process is a third party evaluator, tasked with capturing processes and outcomes of the Innovation Grant. These evaluations will be used to create a menu of options for schools wishing to achieve improved student achievement. This emphasis on "scaling up" effective practices sets this grant apart from other such investments.

The first year has seen many successes, from increased engagement, to improved student achievement. It will be exciting to see these projects unfold over the next three years.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Department of Education with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Matt Blomstedt  
Commissioner of Education



# NEBRASKA INNOVATION

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## GRANT PROGRAM



**Report Prepared by:**

Lane Carr, Innovation Grant Manager

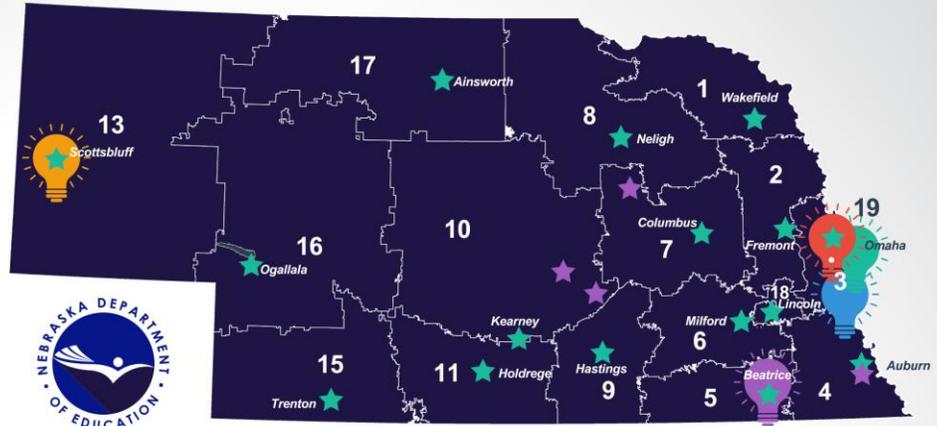
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November 8, 2017



**NEBRASKA  
INNOVATION  
GRANT PROGRAM**



**Expanded Learning Opportunities  
Design Challenge - \$893,565**

Nebraska's Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) Design Challenge is a partnership designed to provide a statewide coalition of districts, community partners and key education and community stakeholders with opportunities to design and test new models of ELO curriculum that support Nebraska Career Readiness Standards.



**Plattsmouth Community School  
District - \$107,089**

Plattsmouth High School (PHS) will use the Wall-to-Wall Career and College Readiness project to refine its wall-to-wall academy program into a model for Nebraska's schools. The PHS model is based on student interests, learning preferences, and career goals and involves extensive partnerships with community businesses and educational programs.



**Educational Service Unit  
Coordinating Council (ESUCC) -  
\$1,640,839**

The Data-driven Ecosystem Enhancing Teaching and Improving Learning for Students (DE2TAILS) project will enable the ESUCC to incorporate multiple online educational and data-collection systems into one statewide, secure, single sign-on portal. The goal is to develop, implement, and sustain an integrated ecosystem to allow relevant teaching and learning applications and tools to integrate, sharing data elements for the improvement of student learning and reporting.

**Scottsbluff Public School District -  
\$827,913**

Scottsbluff Public Schools' Wall-to-Wall Career Academy model will include six career academies. As students progress through middle school and their freshman and sophomore years, they will be provided with instruction and experiences that will help them determine areas that interest them. Then, as juniors and seniors, they will select and refine their focus in Foundational Academies.



**Westside Community Schools  
(WCS) - \$896,993**

The Personalized 21st Century Learning Initiative will use instruction tailored to meet each individual student's needs, skills, knowledge, and learning interests. The project includes an overarching goal of promoting the academic performance of all WCS students through personalized learning opportunities with particular emphasis on those experiences which leverage technology.

★ indicates multiple locations participating in the grant

## Executive Summary

The Department of Education Innovation Fund and Innovation Grant Program were created with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 519, effective August 30, 2015. On October 20, 2016 the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) requested applications for grants through the Innovation Grant Program. This competitive grant program provides funding to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to support the development, expansion and investment in innovative best practices that improve:

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- Transitions between any successive stages of education; or
- Transitions between education and the work force.

The Nebraska State Board of Education approved five applications on February 3, 2017 after a total of 18 applications were received by the NDE totaling \$17,692,476 in requests. The quality of the proposals and the approaches to innovation was inspirational and set the stage for high expectations in the development of evidence-based practices intended for dissemination and possible replication throughout the state of Nebraska.

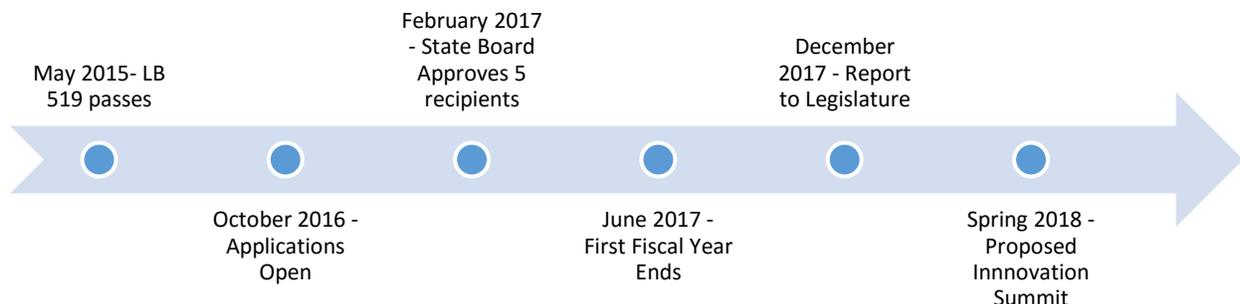
*There are almost 14,000 students and 1,000 teachers impacted by the school systems involved in the grant, with statewide reach from the Educational Service Unit Council.*

The five recipients, with awards totaling \$4.4 million, represent promising practices in improving student success in the state. One requirement of the grant process is a third party evaluator, tasked with capturing processes and outcomes of the Innovation Grant. These evaluations will be used to create a menu of options for schools wishing to achieve improved student achievement. This emphasis on “scaling up” effective practices sets this grant apart from other such investments.

An additional accomplishment in the first year was the hiring of an Innovation Grant Manager within the Department of Education in May 2017. This individual will be tasked with supporting the grant recipients, managing grant financial requests, ensuring strong evaluative practices, and assisting other schools in scaling up and replicating innovative initiatives to improve student achievement. This individual will also report on progress to diverse stakeholders throughout the 30-month time.

## Background

The Innovation Grant Program was created by LB519 (2015). This bill initially appropriated \$2.7 million to carry out the provisions established in LB519. Each subsequent year through the 2020-21 fiscal year, the bill appropriates 17 percent of the Nebraska Education Improvement Fund managed by the Nebraska Department of Education to be used for the Innovative Grant Fund.



## Allocations and Budgetary Breakdown

Fiscal Year	Education Innovation Fund Allocation	NDE Innovation Grant Allocation	Grant Awards to Recipients	Operating/Salary
2016-17	\$5,089,907	\$2,763,911	\$1,302,876	\$128,860
2017-18	\$6,365,862	\$1,959,747	\$1,821,484	\$129,787
2018-19	\$5,492,262		\$1,242,239	

## 2017 Grant Applicants and Review Process

In October 2016, the Nebraska Department of Education opened the grant for applicants with grant guidance and a pre-application worksheet. Eighteen applicants submitted proposals by the closing date, March 3, 2017. These applicants represented small, rural schools, large districts, consortia, and Educational Service Units. The Department next formed a review committee consisting of three external reviewers. Using an external review process and rubric, the 18 applicants were screened with ultimately five selected (Appendix A, B).

### PRE-APPLICATION

July through  
October, 2016

- **JULY 27th, 2016:** Commissioner of Education announces *Request for Proposals (RFP)* at *School Administrator Days*.
- **SEPTEMBER 30th:** *Pre-Application Guide and RFP* posted on Nebraska Department of Education's website and *NDE Bulletin*.
- **SEPTEMBER 30th – OCTOBER 20th:** Applicants develop *Pre-Applications*.
- **OCTOBER 20th:** Deadline for submitting *Pre-Applications* to Nebraska Department of Education.
- **OCTOBER 21st – 31st:** *Pre-Applications* are reviewed and scored.

### GRANT APPLICATION

October through  
December, 2016

- **OCTOBER 20th, 2016:** *Grant Application Guide and RFP* posted on Nebraska Department of Education's website and *NDE Bulletin*.
- **NOVEMBER 4th:** Applicants with highly rated *Pre-Applications* are notified and invited to submit a full *Grant Application* and *Project Evaluation Plan*.
- **NOVEMBER 4th – DECEMBER 14th:** Applicants with highly rated *Pre-Applications*, and other applicants choosing to, develop full *Grant Applications* and *Project Evaluation Plans*.
- **DECEMBER 14th:** Deadline for submitting *Grant Applications* and proposed *Project Evaluation Plans* to Nebraska Department of Education.
- **DECEMBER 15th – 30th:** *Grant Applications* and proposed *Project Evaluation Plans* are reviewed and scored.

## Recipients & Grant Updates

Five recipients were awarded Innovation Grants in February 2017. Grant awards totaled nearly \$4.4 million over the 30-month period. The grant emphasizes evaluation, scaling up, and recording best practices for other schools to replicate. The five recipients represent a diverse array of initiatives, detailed below.

*Plattsmouth Community Schools Career Academy (\$107,089)*

The mission of Plattsmouth Community School District is to work in partnership to ensure academic achievement, responsible behavior, and civic engagement. Plattsmouth High School will use the “Wall-to-Wall Career and College Readiness” project to refine its wall-to-wall academy program into a model for Nebraska’s schools. The project goal is to increase student academic and CTE competence by implementing an AQuESTT aligned and National Career Academy Coalition certified wall-to-wall career academy program at Plattsmouth High School.



*Figure 1-Plattsmouth student works on diesel motor.*

*Scottsbluff Wall-to-Wall Career Academies (\$827,913)*

Scottsbluff Public Schools’ Wall-to-Wall Career Academy model will include six career academies as identified by the Nebraska Career Education Model, and each Academy will include multiple career pathways. As students’ progress through middle school and their freshman and sophomore years, they will be provided with instruction and experiences that will help them determine areas about which they would like to learn more. Then, as juniors, they will all select one Foundational Academy among the six alternatives. As seniors, they can select a second Foundational Academy in a new area or, if they really enjoyed their junior year experience and want to move further along, they can select a Specialized Academy in the same area.



*Figure 2-Scottsbluff students create iPhone app.*

*Expanded Learning Opportunity Design Challenge (\$893,565)*

Nebraska’s Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) Design Challenge (Challenge) is a statewide partnership led by the non-profit Beyond School Bells intending to formulate, prototype, validate and ultimately scale up replicable and economically viable models of intentional, engaging, high-quality afterschool and summer curriculum and programming that supports K-8 student and school success and are powered by strong school-community partnerships. Five schools participate in the consortium: Grand Island, Boone Central, Auburn, Beatrice, and Centura.



*Figure 3- Student works with community volunteer to design a route for a robot during afterschool program.*

*Westside 21<sup>st</sup> Century Personalized Learning (\$896,993)*

The Personalized 21st Century Learning Initiative will leverage more than two years of intensive planning and infrastructure development to support the full implementation of personalized learning across Westside Community Schools’ 14 school sites. Personalized learning is a pedagogical approach where instruction is tailored to meet



*Figure 4-Westside student works on personalized project.*

each individual student's needs, skills/knowledge, and learning interests. As such, personalized learning fully rejects the outdated, passive learning model where instruction is prescribed and delivered to the masses, rather than delivered in accord with the specific needs and interests of diverse students possessing varying interests, achievement levels, and learning styles. The project includes an overarching goal of promoting the academic performance of all WCS students through a rich continuum of personalized learning.

*Data-driven Ecosystem Enhancing Teaching and Improving Learning for Students-D2ETAILS* (\$1,640,839)  
The Data-driven Ecosystem Enhancing Teaching and Improving Learning for Students (DE2TAILS) project will enable ESUCC to incorporate multiple on-line educational and data-collection systems into one statewide, secure, single sign-on portal. The goal is to develop, implement, and sustain an integrated ecosystem, governed by policies and practices, to allow relevant teaching and learning applications and tools to integrate; sharing data elements for the improvement of student learning and reporting.

### **Early Evaluation**

The Innovation Grant has put strong emphasis on rigorous evaluation, requiring each grant recipient to contract an outside evaluator. Evaluation is important for an analysis of the return on these investments, outcomes and impacts of innovations, and implementation for other schools. As schools look to improve their practices, they must have a menu of high-quality, evaluated options to implement.

The focus of these past eight months of grant implementation has been on grant activities. As such, baseline or beginning data is all that is available at this time. Evaluators are working collaboratively to share common tools, and create common metrics across all grants. One early common area of interest across all grants is student "soft skills" such as motivation, voice and choice, creativity, teamwork, and conflict resolution. The evaluation team will continue to work collaboratively to ensure to create this common metric across all grants.

A more comprehensive report of outcomes and progress with detailed data will be reported after year one of grant implementation. Information about grant evaluators and collection methods are below:

#### *Expanded Learning Opportunity Design Challenge*

The evaluation of this project is led by Dr. Leslie Hawley at the University of Nebraska's Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools. This evaluation will focus on measures of college and career readiness in grades K-8 following the Nebraska Department of Education's college and career readiness standards. These standards involve measures of students' soft skills such as creativity and innovation, teamwork, and conflict resolution. The ELO project will also use the Dimensions of Success metric focused on hands-on, minds-on work.

#### *Plattsmouth Community Schools Career Academy*

Plattsmouth is partnering with the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) to evaluate its program. Specifically, Dr. Dana Brown with Mountain Home Public Schools will serve as lead evaluator. Fundamentally, the NCAC reviewer will be comparing Plattsmouth's progress to the NCAC National Standards of Practice, and career academy integration into the school's continuous

improvement process. The evaluator will also be using the high school MAP tests, student achievement metrics like ACT, and the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool.

#### *Scottsbluff Wall-to-Wall Career Academies*

Dr. Frank Shimerdla and Dr. Neal Grandgenett of UNO are responsible for evaluating Scottsbluff's career academies. Since this endeavor is wall-to-wall, meaning all students participate, there is rich data available. The evaluators are using student achievement data like ACT and GPA in addition to matriculation data. Dr. Shimerdla and Dr. Grandgenett are also using surveys to stakeholders, including students, teachers, and industry.

#### *Westside 21<sup>st</sup> Century Personalized Learning*

Dr. Grandgenett and Dr. Shimerdla are joined by their colleague Dr. Elliot Ostler in the evaluation of Westside's personalized learning initiative. The evaluators are investigating the role of personalized learning on student achievement, motivation, and critical thinking, and are using surveys of teachers, students, and parents. Student achievement data will also be examined.

#### *Data-driven Ecosystem Enhancing Teaching and Improving Learning for Students*

The ESUCC project involves perhaps the most complicated evaluation, with five separate initiatives to engage educators in data use in school. Facilitated by RMC Research, Dr. John Sutton and Dr. Xin Wang are using many tools, including a quasi-experimental trial regarding digital learning. Drs. Sutton and Wang are developing protocols for measuring technology use, teaching practices, confidence and preparedness levels for teachers, and a classroom observation and interview/focus group protocols. These instruments will be piloted in the first year, and validated in the second. Ultimately, the researchers hope to tie the use of data in the classroom to gains in student achievement.

### **The Future**

The NDE will continue to work with the five recipients to rigorously evaluate their innovations. Specifically, the processes and outcomes of grant activities will be monitored and evaluated by both the NDE and external evaluators so at the conclusion of the 30 month period, other schools can look to these innovations as replicable interventions. The NDE will continue evaluating results from the first five innovators before opening the second grant cycle for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.

In the meantime, the NDE is looking for ways to further support innovation in schools. Nebraska educators innovate daily, with the state's teachers and leaders creating exciting opportunities for their students. Still, innovation in education is no longer a "nice to have" but rather a "must have," and to make truly systemic changes, innovation must be supported by a wide range of community supporters, non-profits, business leaders, and public agencies.

As such, the NDE is proposing an Innovation Summit. The Summit seeks to create connections between stakeholders, celebrate innovation in the state, and build on the progress of the Innovation Grants. Overall, the hope of this summit is for educators to leave empowered with an understanding of what it takes to successfully pursue diverse funding streams, and funders to learn the needs of a new audience.

In sum, NDE seeks to use its roles as **Connector** to bring together schools, businesses, out-of-school programs, postsecondary, state agencies, and other community partners; **Change Agent** in researching, promoting, and providing support for promising new initiatives and innovations in education in the state and nation; and **Capacity Builder**, recognizing and celebrating schools and districts in the state with effective educational practices and connecting schools to highlight learnings and best practices. The NDE is planning on having the Innovation Summit in the Spring of 2018.

### **Conclusion**

The NDE is delighted to have the opportunity to highlight and support innovations in schools across Nebraska. To see truly transformative change and to embody NDE's role as **Change Agent**, it is the Department's responsibility to continue to support the five Innovation Grant recipients described above, rigorously evaluate their progress, and share the results with other schools to ensure a vibrant educational system for the state's 300,000 students.

Appendix A: 2017 Applicants and Award Recipients

2017 Recipients

Applicant	Project Title
Beatrice Public Schools (et al)	Expanded Learning Opportunity Design Challenge
Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council	Data-Driven Ecosystem Enhancing Teaching and Improving Learning for Students
Plattsmouth Community Schools	Wall-to-Wall Career and College Readiness
Scottsbluff Public Schools	SBPS Wall-to-Wall Career Academy
Westside Community Schools	Personalized 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative

2017 Applicants

Applicant	Project Title
Bancroft-Rosalie & Norris Public Schools	Competency Based Education as Innovative Practice in Nebraska
Bellevue Public Schools	Closing Achievement Gaps for English Learners
ESU 2	Pathways 2 Tomorrow – Career Pathways for Rural Schools
ESU 5	Implementing the International Society for Technology in Education’s Standards for Students
ESU 6	Licensed Mental Health/Behavioral Supports for ESU 6
ESU 10	Blended Education Supports for Educators
Grand Island Public Schools	Career Pathways Institute
Kearney Public Schools	Nebraska Education Careers Transitions Access and Readiness
Lincoln Public Schools	Planting Seeds of Innovation in Middle School
Millard Public Schools	Reading Success for All: Delivering Leveled Literacy Intervention in the Classroom Setting
Papillion La Vista Community Schools	Systemic Change to Promote College and Career Readiness for All Students
Schuyler Community Schools	Enhancing the Instructional Model as it Relates to English Language Learners
Waverly (School District 145)	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Student Growth: Agency, Engagement, and Achievement for Career, College, and Life

Appendix B: Grant Application Rubric



**Nebraska Department of Education  
- INNOVATION GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW FORM -**

NDE Form: 02-081  
Date Approved: 12-14-16

- GRANT REVIEWER -			
REVIEWER (Name)			
		DATE REVIEWED	
- GRANT APPLICANT AND PROPOSED PROJECT -			
APPLICANT (Local Education Agency)			
PROJECT TITLE			
PRIORITY CONSIDERATION (Select <u>ONLY ONE</u> , with "X")	TYPE OF INNOVATION GRANT (Phase I Development Grants <u>ONLY</u> )		
<i>High Needs Students</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Phase - I Development Grant</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Students in "Needs Improvement" School</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Phase II - Validation Grant</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Focus on AQuESTT Tenets</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Phase III - Scale-Up Grant</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Leveraging Technology</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	LENGTH OF GRANT (In Months - <i>30 Months Maximum</i> )	<b>30</b>
OPTIONAL COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITY: <i>Matching Funds</i> (% of Total Project Budget Amount - <u>25% Minimum</u> )			25%
- SELECTION CRITERIA -			Points
<b>SIGNIFICANCE</b> (Up to 35 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which the project involves identification, development, or demonstration of an innovative promising practice or method that builds on, or is an alternative to, an existing process, product, strategy or intervention(s) addressing similar needs.</li> </ul>		/5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which the project will, or is expected to, improve education outcomes for the student population(s) served, or improve transitions between successive stages of education or between education and the work force.</li> </ul>		/10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Project's potential for statewide significance.</li> </ul>		/10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Project's potential to be both replicable and scalable.</li> </ul>		/10
	<b>SUB-TOTAL:</b>		
<b>REVIEWER COMMENTS:</b>			
-Grant Application's Strengths:			
-Reviewer Suggestions:			
<b>QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT PLAN</b> (Up to 45 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which the project's stated goal(s), objectives and targeted outcomes are clearly specified and measurable.</li> </ul>		/5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adequacy of the <i>Project Management Plan</i> to achieve the project's goals, objectives and outcomes, on time and within budget, based on clearly defined responsibilities, milestones and timelines for accomplishing project tasks.</li> </ul>		/5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Applicant's capacity to successfully implement the project, on time and within budget.</li> </ul>		/10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operations and evaluation of the project.</li> </ul>		/10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which the <i>Project Logic Model</i> provides a well-developed conceptual framework illustrating the relationships between the project's key components, activities, outputs and targeted outcomes for the student population(s) served.</li> </ul>		/10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adequacy of mechanisms for disseminating information about the project to support further development, expansion or validation.</li> </ul>		/5
<b>SUB-TOTAL:</b>			<b>/45</b>
<b>REVIEWER COMMENTS:</b>			
-Grant Application's Strengths:			
-Reviewer Suggestions:			

- GRANT APPLICANT AND PROPOSED PROJECT -		
<b>APPLICANT</b> ( <i>Local Education Agency</i> )		
<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>		
- SELECTION CRITERIA -		Points
<b>QUALITY OF PROJECT EVALUATION PLAN</b> (Up to 20 points)	▪ Clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by a rigorous independent <i>Project Evaluation</i> and appropriateness of the method(s) for how each question is addressed.	/5
	▪ Extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence of the project's effectiveness.	/5
	▪ Extent to which the proposed <i>Project Evaluation Plan</i> and <i>Project Budget</i> include sufficient resources to carry out a rigorous independent evaluation effectively.	/10
	<b>SUB-TOTAL:</b>	<b>/20</b>
<b>REVIEWER COMMENTS:</b> -Grant Application's Strengths: -Reviewer Suggestions:		
<b>OPTIONAL COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITY</b> (Up to 3 points)	▪ Type of Matching Funds ( <i>Cash Outlay</i> and/or <i>In-Kind Donations</i> ) is briefly described.	/1
	▪ Dollar amount of Matching Funds and percent of total <i>Project Budget</i> that they represent is specified.	/1
	▪ Source(s) of all Matching Funds is briefly described, accompanied by a signed and dated <i>Pledge Letter(s)</i> providing evidence that at least 50% of Matching Funds have been pledged or secured by the time of <i>Grant Application</i> .	/1
	<b>SUB-TOTAL:</b>	<b>/3</b>
<b>REVIEWER COMMENTS:</b> -Grant Application's Strengths: -Reviewer Suggestions:		

- TOTAL SCORE SUMMARY -	
SELECTION CRITERIA:	Points Scored
<b>SIGNIFICANCE</b> (Up to 35 possible points)	
<b>QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT PLAN</b> (Up to 45 possible points)	
<b>QUALITY OF PROJECT EVALUATION PLAN</b> (Up to 20 possible points)	
<b>OPTIONAL COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITY*</b> (Up to 3 possible points)	
<b>TOTAL SCORE:</b> (Up to 100 Total Points / 103* Total Points with Optional Competitive Preference Priority)	