

LAUNCH PILOT FOCUS GROUP INVITATION EMAIL

Dear [NAME OF LAUNCH PILOT PERSONNEL],

I am writing on behalf of 2M Research (2M) to invite you to participate in a focus group regarding your launch pilot's engagement with NSF INCLUDES technical assistance (TA).

NSF has contracted 2M to provide developmental evaluation support for continuous learning during the NSF INCLUDES program. As part of its evaluation efforts, 2M will be conducting focus groups via Skype with a sample of launch pilot personnel. We would like to learn about your participation in TA and how those experiences have contributed to the development and implementation of your launch pilot. The information you provide will help NSF support upcoming launch pilot activities as well as inform the next stages of the NSF INCLUDES program.

Focus groups are voluntary, but input from the launch pilots is critical to the success of the evaluation and the program, and we thank you in advance for your participation.

Your personal information will be kept confidential. We will organize responses into general themes and no individuals will be identified by name or project.

Focus groups will take approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted by Skype to minimize burden on your schedule. Please send us your availability for the month of October and we will follow up with you to schedule a time that works best for you. If you are unavailable in October and there is another key project staff member who is knowledgeable about your launch pilot's experiences with TA, please let us know so we can schedule a focus group with him or her.

Sincerely,
Ashley Simpkins
Senior Research Analyst
2M Research

NSF INCLUDES
Launch Pilot Focus Group Protocol
OMB CONTROL NUMBER 3145-0215

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Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today about your experience with the technical assistance (TA) being provided to the NSF INCLUDES launch pilots. My name is [NAME OF MODERATOR] and I'm a researcher at 2M Research, a consulting firm specializing in research and evaluation.

TA has been an integral part of the implementation of the NSF INCLUDES initiative and NSF is interested in learning more about your launch pilot's experiences with TA and how they can improve the TA they provide for both launch pilots and Alliances.

There are no right or wrong answers—we'd just like to hear about your experiences participating in TA through NSF INCLUDES launch pilots.

Confidentiality

Your personal information will be kept confidential. We will organize responses from the focus group into general themes, and no individuals will be identified by name.

Permission to Record

We'd like to record today's focus group so we can ensure that our notes are accurate. We will not share the recording with anyone outside of the evaluation team. Do we have your permission to record?

[IF YES] Thank you. We'll start the recording now.

[IF ONE OR MORE PARTICIPANTS DOES NOT GIVE PERMISSION] That's fine. We'll rely on our notes for this focus group.

Now that the recording is started, please state your name and say, "I consent to recording."

[ENSURE THAT EACH PARTICIPANT STATES CONSENT.]

Let's begin with a brief round of introductions.

Participation in NSF INCLUDES TA

First, let's discuss your experiences participating in NSF INCLUDES TA. We ask that you focus on your experiences with TA offered through the TA team and Trellis NSF INCLUDES DDLP Online Community. TA activities include affinity groups, webinars (for example, the "Crafting NSF INCLUDES Annual Reports" webinar), the evaluator and affinity group breakout sessions at the NSF INCLUDES PI Meeting, and other services delivered via the Trellis platform (for example, webchats and virtual office hours). Conferences, the NSF INCLUDES Open Forum, and other sessions at the NSF INCLUDES PI Meeting are not considered a part of TA. **Please exclude those experiences from your answers.**

1. Tell us a little about your reasons for participating in NSF INCLUDES TA?

2. What are some specific ways in which the NSF INCLUDES TA you've participated in has facilitated the implementation (or evaluation) of your launch pilot?
3. What about specific ways, if any, in which the NSF INCLUDES TA has facilitated connections with other launch pilots?
 - a. Has anything tangible resulted from those connections? For example, have you shared resources or worked together on an Alliance proposal?
4. What are some specific challenges you've had in participating in NSF INCLUDES TA?
5. Aside from the TA offered through NSF INCLUDES, what are some other sources of TA that you've relied on to support your launch pilot?

Lessons Learned for the Coordination Hub

As part of the next phase of NSF INCLUDES, NSF is funding a Coordination Hub to serve as the backbone of the network. One role of the Coordination Hub will be to deliver TA to the NSF INCLUDES National Network.

6. What would you say are the most significant TA needs for launch pilots participating in the NSF INCLUDES National Network?
 - a. [IF PARTICIPANTS HAVE TROUBLE IDENTIFYING NEEDS] What have been your biggest challenges as a launch pilot?
 - b. What strategies have you used to identify and address those TA needs [OR LAUNCH PILOT CHALLENGES]?
Examples: Have you conducted a needs assessment? Have you reached out to the TA team for assistance? Have you communicated TA opportunities with other members of your launch pilot?
7. In what specific ways can the Coordination Hub provide support to your launch pilot to help you address those TA needs?
8. If you were advising NSF on the development of the Coordination Hub, what would be your key recommendations for how the Coordination Hub approaches TA?
 - a. Which activities are you finding have been the most useful (for example, webinars or affinity groups)?

Role of TA in Forming a National Network

9. Finally, what do you see as the role of TA in building the NSF INCLUDES National Network?
 - a. What about the role of TA in guiding the development of a shared measurement system?
 - b. What about the role of TA in supporting launch pilots' capacity to expand, scale, and sustain their projects?
 - c. Is there anything you've already learned through your own launch pilot that you'd like to share? For example, about shared measurement or expansion, scaling, and sustainability?

Thank you for your time today!