Part B: Supporting Statement for Paperwork Reduction Act Submission

Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Centers

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B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education (the Department)'s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) requests clearance for new data collection activities to support a national evaluation of the Comprehensive Centers (CCs) program. Specifically, this request covers surveys of state and local education agency staff who are recipients of CC technical assistance (TA) and interviews with the directors of the CCs and another federal technical assistance network with whom the CCs are intended to collaborate—the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs).

The CC program, funded by the Department at over $50 million per year, provides training, tools, and other supports to help state education agencies and local education agencies carry out their education plans and take steps to close achievement gaps. The CCs' services aim to build individual and organizational capacity to help identify and solve key problems. This evaluation will examine the delivery and usefulness of the CCs' technical assistance, given potential new stakeholder needs and changes in the CC program that took effect with the 20 new grants awarded in in 2019.

Congress requires an ongoing evaluation of the Comprehensive Centers program, with the results intended to inform ongoing program improvements. IES has contracted with Abt Associates and its partners AnLar, Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Center for Research in Education & Social Policy (CRESP) at the University of Delaware to conduct this evaluation.

The evaluation will collect data to answer and report on the research questions shown in Exhibit B1 below.

Exhibit B1: CC Evaluation Research Questions

RQ1: What types of educational problems are addressed by Comprehensive Centers, and does the Comprehensive Centers' focus align with the priorities identified by TA recipients? To what extent did Comprehensive Centers shift the focus of their work in response to COVID-19, and how?

1.1   What are the most common educational problems that Comprehensive Centers' projects focus on, and to what extent do they vary across Centers?

1.2   To what extent do the problems that Comprehensive Centers focus on align with the priorities of TA recipients?

1.3   Which TA recipient priorities are not addressed by Comprehensive Center projects, and why?

1.4   To what extent did Comprehensive Centers shift the focus of their work in response to COVID-19? What are the most common COVID-19-related issues that Comprehensive Centers addressed?

1.5   To what extent were the services and activities provided by Comprehensive Centers responsive to TA recipients' COVID-19 needs?

RQ2: What services are Comprehensive Centers providing to TA recipients, and to what extent do the services vary in type and intensity?

2.1   What are the most common services that Comprehensive Centers provide to TA recipients?

2.2   To what extent is there variation in the types and intensity of services provided by Comprehensive Centers?

RQ3: What dimensions of capacity are Comprehensive Center projects designed to increase, and to what extent do TA recipients report that the Centers improve their capacities? To what extent do the Comprehensive Centers build sustainable capacity?

3.1   What dimensions of capacity (human, organizational, policy, and resource) are Comprehensive Center projects designed to increase?

3.2   To what extent do TA recipients report that Comprehensive Centers improve their capacity and in what dimensions?

3.3   To what extent do TA recipients agree that Comprehensive Center support builds sustainable capacity?

RQ4: What are the perceived successes and challenges of changes to the Comprehensive Center program, including the shift in the number and geographic reach of the Regional Centers and expectations to increase collaboration with the Department's Regional Educational Laboratories?

4.1   What are the perceived benefits and challenges of changes to the structure of the Comprehensive Center program?

4.2   To what extent, and in what ways, do Regional Comprehensive Centers collaborate with each other and with the National Comprehensive Center?

4.3   To what extent, and in what ways, do Comprehensive Centers collaborate with the RELs? In what areas do Comprehensive Center and REL activities overlap with each other, if at all?

4.4   To what extent do Comprehensive Centers refer TA recipients to other Department-funded TA Centers?

The study will collect information from TA recipients; all Regional Center Directors; the National Center Director; and all Regional Educational Laboratory Directors. The study will also collect administrative data relevant to answering the research questions. Exhibit B2 shows the timing and frequency of data collection activities through spring of 2022.

Exhibit B2: Timing of Data Collection Activities

Data Source	Respondent	Data Source Type
Spring/Fall 2021		
CC Administrative Documents, including Annual Service Plans (spring), Annual Evaluation Reports (fall), and Joint Needs Sensing Memos (fall)	The Department (U.S. Department of Education, IES)	Administrative data
Restricted Use Data from 2012 Cycle CC Evaluation	The Department	Administrative data
January 2022		
TA recipient contact information	Regional Center Directors and National Center Director	Administrative data
May 2022		
TA Recipient Survey	Key contact for every active Year 2 CC project	Primary data
June/July 2022		
Interviews with CC Directors	Regional Center Directors and National Center Director	Primary data
Interviews with REL Directors	Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Directors	Primary data
Winter/Spring 2022		
CC Administrative Documents, including Annual Service Plans (winter), Annual Evaluation Reports (winter/spring), and Joint Needs Sensing Memos (winter)	The Department	Administrative data

B.1   Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods

For each administrative and primary data source proposed, Exhibit B3 summarizes the respondent universe, sampling methods, and the expected response rates. For primary data sources, Exhibit B3 also provides the response rates, where available, from the corresponding activities in the most recent prior evaluation of the CCs: the 2012 cohort evaluation conducted by IMPAQ International (Weinstock et al., 2019).

B.1.1   Respondent Universe

Respondents include technical assistance recipients identified by CC Directors as the key point of contact for each Year 2 CC project; all CC Directors; all REL Directors; and the Department. Year 2 of the CC cycle started in October 2020 and corresponds to the 2020-2021 school year.

- **CC administrative documents and restricted use data from the 2012 cycle CC cohort (population: 1 respondent):** The respondent universe consists of one respondent: the Department. The study team will request from the Department administrative documents and restricted use data from the 2012 National Evaluation of CCs. Administrative documents include Annual Service Plans, Joint Needs Sensing Memos, and Annual Evaluation Reports for all 20 CCs. Restricted use data from the 2012 cycle include surveys of CC staff and TA recipients administered in the spring of 2015, 2016, and 2017. Final samples from the 2012 cohort evaluation included 232 to 246 TA recipients per year (response rates: 67% to 68%), and 166 to 194 CC staff per year (response rates: 79% to 86%).

- **TA Recipient Survey (population: 233 respondents who received technical assistance):** The respondent universe consists of one key contact per active project. The study team extracted the

full list of all 233 projects that were reported as being active in the Year 2 Annual Service Plans. The study team will email CC Directors to request names, titles, and email addresses for the key contact of each project. If the same TA recipient oversees more than one CC project, the study team will send a single survey with both general questions and questions specific to each project for which that staff member is the key contact.

- **CC Director Interview (population: 20 CC Directors):** The respondent universe consists of directors from the 19 Regional Centers and one National Center active in Year 2.

- **REL Director Interview (population: 10 REL Directors):** The respondent universe consists of the 10 REL Directors for the 2017-2022 cycle.

B.1.2   Sampling Methods

For all data collection activities, the study team will collect data from the census of respondents in each group and thus will not need to select a sample.

B.1.3   Expected Response Rates

The study team anticipates a 100% response rate for information collected from administrative data sources, as well as from the CC Director Interviews and the REL Director Interviews (see Exhibit B3). We anticipate an 80% response rate for the TA Recipient Survey. Details about how the study will achieve these response rates is included below.

CC administrative documents and restricted use data from the 2012 cycle CC cohort: For administrative data sources, the study team will coordinate closely with the Department to ensure that the team's data requests clearly specify the documents requested, the data security methods that the study team will use to protect the privacy of individuals included in the files, and the frequency and timing of data requests. The study team expects a 100% response rate in its administrative data request. The Department is sponsoring this study, recognizes the importance of the administrative data to answering the study research questions, and has significant interest in the study findings.

Contact Information for Primary TA Recipient Contacts: The study team anticipates full participation for this administrative data request from CC Directors because providing TA recipients' contact information will involve minimal burden for CC Directors. This information is likely to be readily available to CC Directors and their project teams because they will already be providing similar information to their evaluators; these evaluators typically survey TA recipients to collect information on Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) indicators needed for the Annual Evaluation Reports. The study team will ensure that the fielding periods of the TA Recipient Survey and local evaluation surveys do not overlap in order to minimize respondent burden and maximize response rates.

TA Recipient Survey: The target response rate for the survey is 80% (responses for 186 projects). Section B3 describes the strategies that the team will use to maximize participation and achieve the target response rate.

CC Director Interviews and REL Director Interviews: The study team will work with all CC Directors and REL Directors to schedule the interview at a convenient time when they are available. The study team anticipates that all directors will participate in this interview given their interest in learning from this study about promising practices and areas for program improvement, and the 100% CC staff response

rates achieved in the study for the 2012 CC cohort (Exhibit B3). Section B3 describes the strategies that will be used to maximize participation in the interviews to achieve the target response rates.

Exhibit B3: Data Sources, Respondents, Sample, and Response Rates

Data Source	Respondent	Respondent Universe	Sample	Response Rate Expected	Prior Response Rate
Administrative Data					
Annual Service Plans, Annual Evaluation Reports, and Joint Needs Sensing Memos	The Department (U.S. Department of Education, IES)	1	census	100%	Not applicable
Contact information for Year 2 TA recipients	Regional Center Directors (19) National Center Director (1)	20	census	100%	Not applicable
Primary Data					
TA Recipient Survey	Key contact for every active Year 2 CC project	233	census	80%	67-68%[a]
Interviews with CC Directors	Regional Center Directors (19) National Center Director (1)	20	census	100%	100%
Interviews with REL Directors	REL Directors	10	census	100%	Not applicable

[a] The restricted use data includes various types of data from the 2012 cohort evaluation, including activity reports and other CC documents, such as theories of action or logic models, annual management plans, and project documents, and data from surveys and interviews of CC staff and recipients of technical assistance collected in the spring of 2015, 2016, and 2017.

B.2   Statistical Methods for Sample Selection and Degree of Accuracy Needed

B.2.1   Sample Selection

As noted in Section B.1.2 Sampling Methods, the study team will not use sampling methods for any data collection. The data collection from each source will involve the census of respondents in each universe.

B.2.2   Estimation Procedures

To address the research questions, the study team will use two types of analytic methods.

- **Descriptive analyses** – The study team will produce summary statistics such as means and standard deviations for continuous variables and tabulations such as frequency distributions and percentages for categorical variables.

- **Comparative analyses** – To compare groups, such as administrative challenges by the type of capacity that CCs aimed to develop, the study team will conduct cross-tabulations and use common statistical tests, such as an F-test, to determine whether differences are statistically significant or likely due to chance.

The study team will summarize findings and present them in tables and exhibits in the final report. All text describing findings will be presented in plain language.

B.2.3   Degree of Accuracy Needed for the Purpose Described

The analysis of CC implementation will be based on interviews with all CC and REL Directors and a survey of the universe of TA recipients for Year 2 projects. Because the data are based on the universe, descriptive statistics will not be subject to sampling error.

Although the study team will survey the universe of TA recipients, we anticipate some non-response. If response rates fall below 80%, the study team will conduct non-response analyses. First, the study team will compare administrative data on the characteristics of individuals who completed the surveys to the characteristics of those who did not. Second, these baseline characteristics will be used in a statistical model to predict the probability that a targeted survey respondent was located and responded to the survey. If these analyses point to the possibility of non-response bias, sampling weights will be created based on the observable baseline characteristics and used in analyses.

B.2.4   Unusual Problems Requiring Specialized Sampling Procedures

Not applicable.

B.2.5   Use of Periodic Data Collection Cycles to Reduce Burden

Exhibit B2 shows the timing of data collection activities. To minimize burden, the study team will collect data from each of the following sources only once during the study period:

- o   Restricted Use Data from the 2012 Cycle CC Evaluation (Spring 2022);
- o   Contact information for TA recipient project contacts (January 2022);
- o   TA Recipient Survey (May 2022);
- o   CC Director interviews (June/July 2022); and
- o   REL Director interviews (June/July 2022).

The study team will also collect administrative data in two waves: once in the spring and fall of 2021 and again in the winter and spring of 2022. Because the Department will provide these administrative data to the study team, there is no burden to any external individuals or entities associated with the collection of these administrative data.

B.3   Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse

B.3.1   Maximize Response Rates

To maximize response rates, the study team will use strategies that have been proven successful in its prior studies, including the Evaluation of Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative, the Teacher Incentive Fund Evaluation, the Study of Enhanced College Advising in Upward Bound, and the study of Student Messaging in GEAR UP.

General strategies to maximize response rates include:

- **Multi-tiered, multi-mode approach for survey data collection.** For the TA Recipient Survey, the study team will communicate with each target respondent in advance of the survey, at the start of the survey fielding period, and during the survey fielding period using multiple modes of

communication including phone and e-mail. All survey communications will also include contact information for a designated study team member in case respondents have questions or encounter technical issues. The email invitations will contain a unique survey link for each recipient, allowing for close monitoring of survey completions and targeted follow-up to improve response rates. The study team will administer the survey on a platform that is compatible with mobile devices as well as traditional (desktop) screen sizes. To reduce burden and improve the response rate over the prior evaluation, the survey will also employ skip logic and, unlike the 2012 cohort evaluation survey of SEAs and other CC technical assistance recipients (Weinstock et al., 2019), avoids open-ended questions. The study team has developed surveys that contain clear language and are easy to complete. Pilot testing confirmed that the survey can be finished within 20 minutes.

- **Regular monitoring and follow-up with nonrespondents to survey data collection.** Once the survey invitations are sent, the study team will maximize response rates by carefully monitoring responses and sending targeted reminders as needed. Specifically, the team will closely monitor any email addresses that are undeliverable and attempt to obtain updated email addresses or another method for delivering the survey to intended recipients. The study team will send weekly targeted reminders to non-respondents. Pre-notifications about surveys and repeated reminders have also been shown to be associated with higher responses rates in email surveys (Fan & Yan, 2010). In addition, the team will follow up via phone with TA recipient contacts who do not respond to the email survey invitation or email follow-up reminders. Finally, one week prior to the end of the survey administration period, the study team will ask CC Directors to provide a final reminder to non-respondents to complete the survey. This request will include an email template that the CC Directors can simply forward to the TA recipients who have yet to respond to the survey.

- **Incorporating data collected from other sources to reduce burden and increase response rates for interview data collection.** To minimize burden on respondents during the interview, project-specific information will be collected via a pre-interview template sent to CC Directors. Each REL Director interview will last for no longer than 30 minutes and will be conducted via phone or a videoconferencing platform. Each CC Director interview will last no more than 60 minutes. In advance of each interview, the interview team will review all available data from the applicable Annual Service Plans, Joint Needs Sensing Memos, and Annual Evaluation Reports— as well as the TA Recipient Survey data—prior to undertaking the interview. Reviewing these information sources will allow the interview team to obtain relevant information—for example, about the CC's work or collaboration with the National Center or a REL—ahead of the interview and to pre-populate the protocol with relevant information, thus further reducing the burden on the respondent.

- **Dedicated liaisons for each interviewee.** The study team will assign the lead interviewer for each prospective CC Director and REL Director interview to serve as a liaison for that respondent. The liaison will be responsible for all communications with the prospective respondent—for example, communications related to scheduling and conducting the interviews, as described below, and as well as requests to CC Directors for TA recipient contact information, as described above. Liaisons can help establish a relationship and build trust with the prospective respondents, which can help increase response rates. Should any CC Director not respond to, or

refuse, at request for an interview, the study team will ask the director of the CC program office at the Department to request participation in the study.

B.3.2   Dealing with Non-Response

As noted in Section B.2.3, if the TA Recipient Survey response rate falls below 80%, the study team will conduct non-response analyses to assess non-response bias and determine whether sampling weights are needed in the final analysis. In addition to examining non-response at the survey level, the team will also assess the extent of missing data at the item level. Moreover, the team will identify implausible values or other data irregularities, which should be minimal given the types of questions and response options and the validation checks in the survey platform. If needed, the team will generate cleaned versions of raw variables in which outliers and implausible values are either recoded or replaced with special missing values indicating that the original reported value was out of range

As noted previously, the study team does not anticipate any non-response for the CC Director interviews, given their interest in the study findings. If any nonresponse does occur, the study team will use administrative data from CCs' Annual Service Plans, Joint Needs Sensing Memos, and Annual Evaluation Reports to compare CC-level characteristics and, when applicable, project-level characteristics for CC Directors who completed the interviews to the projects of those who did not.

B.4   Test of Procedures and Methods to Be Undertaken

The following procedures were undertaken to finalize development of the survey and interview protocols:

Pilot testing surveys: During the 60-day public comment period, the study team conducted cognitive interviews with three eligible TA recipients affiliated with three different Regional Centers to pilot test the TA recipient survey. Pilot test participants were nominated by CC Directors. During these cognitive interviews, the team collected feedback about survey length, clarity, and relevance. This process sought to identify any areas of confusion, misunderstanding, or gaps in the survey instrument, as well as ensure that the survey takes no longer than 20 minutes per project to complete. Respondents identified questions that were challenging to answer and items where additional clarity was necessary.

Exhibit B4 displays the response time for each survey instrument pilot.

Exhibit B4. Average Minutes to Complete Surveys

Survey	Minutes
Test 1	14
Test 2	22
Test 3	22

The time review and pilot testing resulted in the following revisions to the TA recipient surveys to shorten the length and clarify survey item wording and response options. Specifically, the study team:
- Clarified the instructions to the survey respondent

- Edited the wording of some questions and response options for clarity

- Consolidated response options for one question to shorten the overall survey length

- Dropped two questions that were either redundant or non-essential to the study goals

Pilot testing interview protocols: During the 60-day public comment period, the study team piloted the interview protocol with a CC Director, and probed for questions that were challenging to answer and items where additional clarity was necessary. The pilot testing resulted in the following revisions to the interview protocol to shorten the length and clarify item wording. Specifically, the study team:

- Revised the wording of some questions for clarity

- Removed five questions from the interview protocol, because they were either not essential to answer the research questions, or can be addressed through other data sources

- Separated one question into three separate questions to improve clarity

The study team also will undertake several strategies for ensuring high-quality data collection after the instruments are finalized.

- **Programming and testing the TA Recipient Survey:** Once the TA Recipient survey is finalized, the team will use the Confirmit Horizons platform—which is compatible with desktop, laptop, tablet, and mobile survey completion—to program the online survey. In programming the survey, the team will validate any numerical entries to ensure they are within an acceptable range, and prompt respondents for responses when skipped. This will limit the potential for inaccurate data entries and missed questions. Prior to fielding the survey, the team will test the programmed survey on different types of devices—such as different types of smart phones and computers—to ensure functionality of skip logic, any information that is piped into question text, and response validation. Once the survey is in the field, the team will review incoming data at several points throughout the data collection process to make sure they are correct and complete.

- **Interviewer training:** To ensure interviewers are adequately prepared, the study team will conduct separate interview training sessions for interviewers and note takers based on respondent type (CC Director and REL Director). The Department's Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) will also be invited to these internal trainings. These trainings will cover the interview procedures and protocols, background on the evaluation, and best practices for scheduling and preparing for interviews, conducting interviews, recording and coding interview responses, preserving confidentiality, cleaning and organizing data post-interview, and protecting data security. The study team will also provide written training materials and guidance to interviewers and note takers to use as a reference during data collection.

- **Conducting interviews:** To ensure high-quality data are collected from interviews, a senior researcher from the study team will serve as the lead interviewer, with a junior researcher also present to take notes during the interview. The study team will select staff with extensive interview and qualitative data collection experience to serve as the lead interviewers, prioritizing researchers with prior knowledge or experience with CCs, RELs, and other technical assistance centers.

- **Post-interview procedures:** Once the interviews are conducted, note takers will clean their notes and send them to the lead interviewer within three days of the interview. The interviewer will identify any areas where the two researchers might have differing impressions of the interview and reconcile any differences with the note taker. The interview team will use the audio recording and the transcript to reconcile remaining differences. After interview data have been analyzed, the analysis and interview team members will meet to review coding decisions and discuss new

responses and themes that emerged within and across each respondent type. The transcripts from open-ended questions that do not include pre-specified categories will be double-coded. A reconciliation meeting will be held between the two coders to address any discrepancies between their codes, with the study team lead helping to resolve any remaining discrepancies as needed.

B.5   Individuals Consulted on Statistical Aspects of the Design

The following individuals were consulted on the statistical aspects of the study:

Name	Title/Affiliation	Telephone
Amy Checkoway	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(617) 520-2366
Sarah Costelloe	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 968-4467
Cara Jackson	Senior Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 347-5928
Kelly Lack	Associate, Abt Associates	(617) 520-2749
Sebastian Lemire	Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 347-5691
Amanda Parsad	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 634-1791
Allan Porowski	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(703) 314-3827
Cristofer Price	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 634-1852
Radha Roy	Senior Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 347-5722
Christopher Weiss	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(617) 714-0929

The following individuals will be responsible for the data collection and analysis:

Name	Title/Affiliation	Telephone
Cara Jackson	Senior Associate, Abt Associates	(301) 347-5928
Allan Porowski	Principal Associate, Abt Associates	(703) 314-3827

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