



**School District Central Office Redesign:
A Scan of Research and Practice
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
PROPOSALS DUE: January 20, 2025**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Deep and lasting change in schools and classrooms, and across school systems, depends on coordinated, coherent, and collaborative work across the multiple actors, departments, and systems found in the district central office. To achieve this coherence, many districts must do more than coordinate their work—instead they may need to transform how they are organized, involving changes in practices as well as changes in the structures that reinforce practices and cultures of fragmentation (Honig, 2010; 2012).

What is known about efforts to transform central offices in order to support change?

The Wallace Foundation seeks to commission a **rapid evidence review** of research and practice related to the transformational redesign or reorganization of the central office. We seek to identify a research team that can accomplish this review with rigor and within a tight timeframe of 3-4 months. The study will produce a report to The Wallace Foundation for its internal use and planning. The grant can also (optionally) be used to support the development of a paper for publication in academic journals.

2.0 SCOPE OF WORK

We welcome proposers to suggest particular ideas and strategies for answering the following guiding research question:

What is known, across the research and practice evidence base, about school district central office redesign?

- Why and how have school districts sought to redesign their central office?
- What actions, and sequence of actions, are part of the process, and what results have they yielded?
- Who are the critical actors and what roles do they play? What role, if any, do school boards and state agencies play?
- What does “readiness” for successful engagement in the redesign process look like?
- What challenges and opportunities have been identified in central office redesign?
- What critical questions—in research and in practice—remain about how districts can approach central office redesign?

We anticipate that a rapid evidence review would include (a) a review of the research and gray literature, (b) web scraping to surface current efforts and actions underway, and (c) interviews

with leaders of organizations and individual researchers and others supporting central office redesign, as well as central office leaders with experience in the redesign process, including both successful and less successful experiences.

We are aware that the research on central office is limited, and therefore invite proposers to *also* suggest other fields of practice where lessons could be learned that might be extensible to questions of school district central office redesign.

The main project deliverable would be a report to Wallace addressing the research questions and including recommendations for further work in both research and practice related to advancing efforts in central office redesign.

3.0 PROPOSALS

Proposals are due by January 20, 2025. Proposals must be no more than 8 pages in 11 pt font. Proposals should address:

1. **Your understanding of the goal and benefit** of producing this rapid evidence review. This section should demonstrate your understanding of and experience with the guiding research question and purpose of this study. It should summarize what is commonly known and not known in the field, and what needs to be updated or synthesized. *1-2 pp.*
2. **A research plan.** *2-5 pp.*
 - a. What kinds of data will you collect, how, and from where?
 - b. What theoretical lenses and analytic frameworks will you use to make meaning of the data you collect?
 - c. What are the limitations of your proposed design/process and any mitigants (including altering the timeframes) that might address such limitations.
3. **Your expectations of what a final report** might contain in terms of topics or themes, based on your understanding to date of the question. Final reports should synthesize relevant research and practice, and identify knowledge gaps and need for further investment. *1 p.*
4. **Qualifications of your team** to complete this study. *1 p.*
5. **References**, which do not count towards the page limit.
6. **Links to 1-2 examples of a prior report you have produced** of a similar nature (i.e., summarizing what's known about a given topic and making recommendations for future investments)
7. **Excel budget** and budget explanation. Please budget for copyediting and graphic layout, as needed, as well as research participant incentives. Please also budget funds for the preparation and travel of at least one person to the Wallace office in NYC to present findings in the final report, although we may mutually elect to meet by zoom.

Please also attach a project timeline, resumes/bio sketches of any senior personnel and an example (or link to an example) of a report that you see as similar or related to the scope described herein.

After receipt of proposals, we will reach out to qualified applications and set up meetings for further discussion. if you have any questions about the RFP please contact

4.0 ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is the philanthropic legacy of DeWitt and Lila Wallace, founders of the Reader's Digest. Wallace is one of the nation's 60 largest independent, charitable foundations. We are a national foundation, supporting work across the United States without a focus on any one community or region. We do not fund internationally.

The mission of The Wallace Foundation is to help all communities build a more vibrant and just future by fostering advances in the arts, education leadership, and youth development. The Wallace Foundation takes an unusual approach for a private foundation. Most of our work is carried out through large-scale, multi-year initiatives designed to accomplish dual goals. The first is to support our grantees (such as school districts) to create value for those they serve by developing and strengthening their work at the local level. Our second goal is to add value to the field as a whole by designing initiatives that address important unanswered policy and practice questions, commissioning researchers to document and analyze what is learned by Wallace grantees as they participate in the initiative, and then sharing these findings with practitioners, policymakers and influencers in order to catalyze improvements more broadly. In this way, we aim to use the development of research-based insights and evidence as a lever to help institutions, beyond those we fund directly, enrich and enhance their work.

4.1 Research and Equity

Wallace is committed to supporting research that is designed and conducted with and for equity. To inform strategies for change, research proposals should use strength-based approaches and be designed to shed light on structures, systems, processes, or practices that produce or reproduce inequities or overcome them. Research itself should be equity-centered—including partnerships, processes, and methods that center the voices and perspectives of communities that would stand to use or benefit from the research. Research teams should include principal investigators and other senior intellectual contributors with relevant lived experiences. Theoretical frameworks should be informed by a recognition of systemic forms of exclusion or marginalization. Research methods, from data collection to analysis, should clearly articulate how the use of such frameworks will lead to new insights and understanding at both a practical and conceptual level, what the limitations of the methods are, and how they can support the development of strength-based change strategies. Incentives should be provided for all research participants.

References

- Honig, M. I., Copland, M. A., Rainey, L., Lorton, J. A., & Newton, M. (2010). *Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement*. Retrieved from New York: <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Central-Office-Transformation-District-Wide-Teaching-and-Learning.pdf>
- Honig, M. I. (2012). District Central Office Leadership as Teaching: How Central Office Administrators Support Principals' Development as Instructional Leaders. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 733-774. doi:10.1177/0013161X12443258