



## **REL Northeast and Islands Needs-Assessment Process**

To help guide its program of research alliances and long-term research agenda, REL Northeast & Islands conducts ongoing and rigorous regional needs analysis. A multifaceted and systematic needs-assessment process engages a broad range of regional stakeholders through a variety of activities, including: face-to-face and virtual meetings with existing stakeholder groups; personal outreach to education leaders and policymakers; participation at key professional meetings, public hearings, or conferences; reviews of state policy, research reports, state legislation, and documents posted on state education agency (SEA) websites; and needs-sensing webinars.

### **Needs-Assessment Goals**

Specific goals of the needs-assessment process are to follow trends relevant to REL-NEI's high-priority research topics and to identify emerging regional needs in educational research. The needs-assessment process is designed to solicit timely information for the following purposes:

1. To determine the continued relevance of REL-NEI's current priority topics and inform the scope, duration, and focus of its related research alliances;
2. To identify emerging educational issues and researchable questions in our region;
3. To identify new research alliance opportunities;
4. To inform the use of limited resources for non-alliance research; and
5. To keep the Institute of Education Sciences abreast of current and emerging needs in our region.

### **Regional Priorities**

Four regional priority topics have been identified as areas of high need by stakeholders throughout the Northeast and Islands Region. These topics are closely aligned with the U.S. Department of Education's key priorities, as presented in *A Blueprint for Reform*, and include:

1. Identification and retention of effective teachers and principals;
2. Improvement of low-performing schools and districts;
3. Educational equity and support for special populations; and
4. College and career readiness, access, and completion.

REL-NEI's current eight research alliances address aspects related to these regional priorities.

### **State Liaisons**

REL-NEI's regional needs analysis is led by Task 1 Lead Maria-Paz Avery and a team of researchers and four State Liaisons who serve as the central point of contact for key stakeholders in the region's nine

states and territories. State Liaisons conduct needs-assessment activities on a regular basis to identify challenges to improving student achievement and success, researchable questions to address these challenges, local research capacity, and research training or support that REL-NEI can provide. State Liaisons have experience leading needs-sensing activities, established relationships with stakeholders, and knowledge of local- and state-level educational policy and practice. Each liaison works out of a local office in one of the states or territories they serve.

### **Request Assistance Mechanism (RAM)**

To further facilitate regional needs analysis, RELNEI will develop a “Request for Assistance” mechanism on its website through which stakeholders will be able to submit questions related to educational research and policy and requests for analytic technical support. These questions, along with basic information on the requestor, will be entered into a needs-assessment database and analyzed by themes as part of the regional needs-assessment process. The Task 1 Lead and her staff will review these requests and determine how best to respond to these requests, including forwarding them to the appropriate research alliance.

### **Needs-Sensing Webinars**

Needs-sensing webinars will be offered periodically at the regional or state level. These webinars will serve two purposes: (1) outreach to a broad range of stakeholders on specific topics related either to the current research alliances or to emerging regional needs; and (2) tailored needs assessment on a specific topic to define and refine potential research questions.

### **Needs-Assessment Database**

All needs, questions, and issues identified through State Liaison interactions with stakeholders, the RAM, needs-sensing webinars, and the analysis of state and regional data sources will be recorded in a needs-assessment database. The database will include, at a minimum, requestor demographic information, date of request, state or territory, topic of request, and response provided to support detailed descriptive analyses of current and emerging needs in the region. Uniform protocols for note-taking and documentation will ensure consistency in the data-gathering and analyses processes.

### **Needs-Analysis Reports**

Descriptive analyses of needs will be conducted monthly to identify recurring patterns of questions and issues; compare trends over time; and highlight emerging topics not yet being addressed. On a quarterly basis, the Task 1 team will develop an internal memo that will synthesize regional needs in the context of the REL’s current priority topics and highlight emerging trends. This memo will be disseminated and discussed internally, and with our Governing Board, to inform and monitor the alignment between our body of work and the needs of the region. Quarterly reports will be posted on our website in abbreviated form to inform our stakeholders of both state-based and regional trends.

## REL-NEI Needs-Assessment Process Flow Chart

