ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2021

Report Prepared by:

Ganesan Kanagarajan, MBA, PMP, ITIL
Administrator, Information systems & services
Office of Data, Research, & Evaluation
500 S. 84th St., 2nd Floor
Lincoln NE, 68510-2611
Email: Ganesan.Kanagarajan@nebraska.gov

During February 2022

Table of Contents

1   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 to improve educational outcomes for students in K through 12 while helping them pave their paths towards successive education and subsequent assimilation into the workforce.
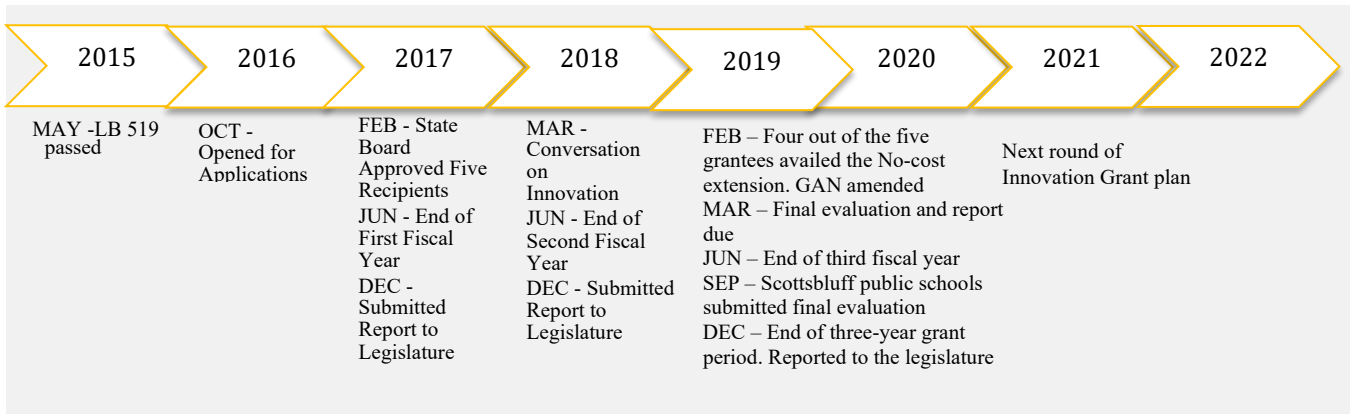
The Nebraska State Board of Education approved five applications between June & August 2019. These five approved recipients and their respective projects have demonstrated substantial growth, from increased engagement to improved student achievement. The projects have grown leaps and bounds over the past two years, incorporating cutting-edge technology, innovative teaching methods and special emphasis on the overall socio-emotional development of the student lives the program touches. Thus, changing the way education is imparted in the state, and the possibility of scaling up, after the successful realization of the goals outlined in their plans. The program has helped set the stage for high expectations in the development of evidence-based practices intended for dissemination and possible replication throughout the state of Nebraska.

This report simply summarizes the progress of all the grantees of the innovation grant, emphasis on important developments and amendments that occurred in the past year while shedding some light on the future endeavors of the Innovation Grant.

2   Background

The Department of Education Innovative Grant Fund and the Innovation Grant Program were created with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 519, effective August 30, 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. This competitive grant program provides funding opportunities 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 workforce.*

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
MAY - LB 519 passed	OCT - Opened for Applications	FEB - State Board Approved Five Recipients JUN - End of First Fiscal Year DEC - Submitted Report to Legislature	MAR - Conversation on Innovation JUN - End of Second Fiscal Year DEC - Submitted Report to Legislature	FEB – Four out of the five grantees availed the No-cost extension. GAN amended MAR – Final evaluation and report due JUN – End of third fiscal year SEP – Scottsbluff public schools submitted final evaluation DEC – End of three-year grant period. Reported to the legislature		Next round of Innovation Grant plan	

Timeline: Innovation Grant

3 Year in Review 2021

3.1 Education Innovation Network (EIN) for Asynchronous Professional learning Education (APL)

3.1.1 About

Online, asynchronous learning (often referred to as E-learning) has become prevalent in many corporate and nongovernmental organizations because it provides greater access and flexibility to meet the needs of professionals in work settings. An Education Innovation Network (EIN) for Asynchronous Professional Learning (APL) is being established to advance the effective use of online, asynchronous learning for education professionals – teachers, early childhood care providers, professional staff, administrators, and faculty – in Nebraska's education agencies.

The APL network was focused on providing the training and resources needed for participants to be able to create asynchronous professional learning courses to educators across the state using the NDE Learning Network site and their own district and ESU Canvas instances. The NDE contracted with Vivayic to assist in providing support to the project. Vivayic has been an expert in consulting and providing services to their clients on digital learning strategies since 2006. The project provided an annual opportunity for NDE, ESU and school district staff to participate in the project by joining a cohort of educators.

It is important to note that although the project experienced some disruption from the COVID – 19 outbreaks, the outcomes and current participation show strong support for need of APL to continue and grow throughout Nebraska.

Estimated amendment: $250,000 through December 31, 2022

3.1.2 Progress

Project Time period: May 2019 through December 2022

Participants received:

- Training and coaching on Instructional Design and Accessibility/Universal Design
- Planning and development resources to ensure effective outcomes utilizing APL
- Application of effective instructional methods for APL
- Training on Articulate 360® including in depth training of Storyline and Rise eLearning authoring software tools
- Assessment and measurement in APL
- Training and management of APL through learning management systems (Canvas)
- Weekly one-on-one coaching on APL projects including access to APL design professionals for suggestions and troubleshooting
- Participants contributed to and reviewed a collection of best practices, tools, and templates for APL by education agencies to use for expanding the project to a wider audience

Participants (with approval of their supervisor) provided:

- Time – Needed to be available for in-person training (up to 9 days). Spend 8-12 hours per month to participate in virtual training and to engage in peer learning and coaching conversations, and complete individual projects
- Purchase of software – Needed a seat license of Articulate 360 (statewide purchase made this cost lower)
- Travel expenses – No travel expenses to in-person training events were reimbursed (Articulate training in Lincoln for 2 cohorts and virtual for 1 cohort).

Timeline of the Project

Dec. 2019 - Cohort 1 begins ⟶ Aug. 2020 – Cohort 2 begins ⟶ Sept. 2021 – Cohort 3 begins

Jan 2022 – Phase 2 of project begins:

> Phase 2 moves to the creation of resources for use in scaling the project to a sustainable and statewide opportunity. Vivayic teamed with a small group of APL participants to determine what resources are needed and how to develop a system for sustaining APL work across the state and expansion of training to a statewide scale. Vivayic and the NDE will then build out the needed resources and help to deploy them.

Dec. 2022 – Project concludes.

Project Outcomes to Date

- NDE Learning Network Deployed January 2021
- More than 70 participants in the 3 APL cohorts
- Continued weekly participation in coaching office hours for project assistance
- All 3 cohorts created and deployed courses for year 1 of NDE Learning network site (link below)
- 31 courses (1 in Spanish) under development for deployment within NDE Learning Network site
- Additional interest in training of more staff on APL from NDE, ESU and school district staff
- 5,667 educators have registered and/or completed an APL cohort developed course to date

3.2 Instructional materials – Professional learning fellowship & innovation network

3.2.1 About

The goal of the "Instructional Materials-Professional Learning (IM-PL) Fellowship & Innovation Network" is to provide a cohort of districts and ESUs with the role-specific knowledge, skills, and tools to plan for and effectively execute the three phases of adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials—select great materials, prepare to launch, teach and learn. The network leverages a combination of in-person training, school visits, and virtual professional learning communities over the course of 19 months (October 2019 through May 2021). It is designed to equip districts and ESUs with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that they each need to effectively execute their roles as it relates to the review, adoption, and implementation of high-quality instructional materials. It is also designed to build a strong cohort experience among LEAs and ESUs that they can continue to leverage after the Fellowship ends. The network also includes a rigorous evaluation in order to determine if proposed outcomes are met.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has a goal to "create the conditions for high- quality instruction in every classroom, every day" (NDE, n.d., p. 1), which promotes education equity across Nebraska schools. To accomplish this, NDE partnered with Teaching Lab to support school districts through a multistep process to select and implement high-quality instructional materials (HQIMs) in English language arts, math, and science. NDE and Teaching Lab solicited applications from Nebraska school districts and educational service units (ESUs) to participate in the 2-year Instructional Materials-Professional Learning Fellowship & Innovation Network (IM-PL Network). Year 1 spanned the 2019/20 academic year, and Year 2 spanned the 2020/21 academic year. Teaching Lab guided the cohort members through a three-phase structured process: (1) instructional materials selection, (2) planning for implementation, and (3) professional learning and progress monitoring. Each phase included multiple meetings, either in person or virtual and either in a group or one-on-one.

For Year 1, 73 cohort members from 16 school districts and 27 cohort members from 6 ESUs participated in the IM-PL Network, for a total of 100 cohort members. For Year 2, 31 cohort members from 9 school districts and 16 cohort members from 5 ESUs participated, for a total of 47 cohort members. Only 34 cohort members continued from Year 1 to Year 2.
Estimated Cost: To accomplish this Education Innovation Network, $450,000 would be obligated for contracts and competitive grant support for the Network.

3.2.2 Progress

Overall Takeaways:

- Cohort membership declined greatly from Year 1 to Year 2. There were 100 cohort members in Year 1 and 47 cohort members in Year 2. Only 34 cohort members continued from Year 1 to Year 2.
- All school district and ESU cohort members gained experience in the Teaching Lab process to select HQIMs, plan for and monitor their implementation, and provide professional learning on the HQIMs.
- Teaching Lab resources (meetings, templates, guidance documents, articles, and so on)

were well received by cohort members and perceived as useful and beneficial to making progress toward completing milestones.

- Time, money, opportunity for collaboration, and leadership support were the main factors needed for this work to succeed. Cohort members lacked time to complete the milestones in the Teaching Lab process.
- Cohort members experienced more challenges in Year 2 than in Year 1, including a shift in focus related to the Teaching Lab process, and cohort membership and meeting attendance was lower in Year 2 than in Year 1.

Year 1 Takeaways:

- Cohort members noted that the instructional vision-setting milestone was critical to their success, as it solidified the approach by helping all stakeholders land on the same page. However, it was the IM-PL Network's collaborative nature that provided the support required to pursue their instructional visions.
- Cohort members reported they had gained confidence in the components needed to select HQIMs to participate in the IM-PL Network and demonstrated progression through the various milestones.
- The IM-PL Network made cohort members feel less like they were undertaking a task in isolation and more like they were building a community of professionals seeking the same goal of selecting HQIMs for their students. The collaboration and feedback the network (Teaching Lab and cohort members) provided were key to the success of Phase 1 and even prompted the ESUs to consider creating similar networks.
- The IM-PL Network provided cohort members with focus and a structure for the process of selecting HQIMs. However, cohort members called for scaffolding for several points in the process, requested more content, and desired context-related opportunities for collaboration.
- Cohort members were glad to see NDE's consistency in pursuing these statewide initiatives, but they expressed concern about the alignment of Teaching Lab with previous NDE initiatives. They noted that some alignment was needed to portray a cohesive vision between the similar but slightly differing initiatives and show how they would best complement each other.

Year 2 Takeaways:

- Cohort members highlighted collaboration, communication strategies, designated space, time, and focus as key aspects to the success of their work.
- Meeting attendance was lower in Year 2 than in Year 1. This was likely due to the format of the meetings (virtual rather than in person) and lack of time to devote to the IM-PL Network because of COVID-19 restrictions.
- Cohort members reflected on the sense of community they felt as individuals working together to achieve similar goals in implementing HQIMs in their school districts.
- Cohort members had both positive and negative feelings about virtual learning. The overall impression was that in-person meetings were more beneficial.
- Cohort members said that participating in the IM-PL Network increased their confidence in implementing the Teaching Lab process.
- Cohort members agreed they would implement what they learned from the meetings, but
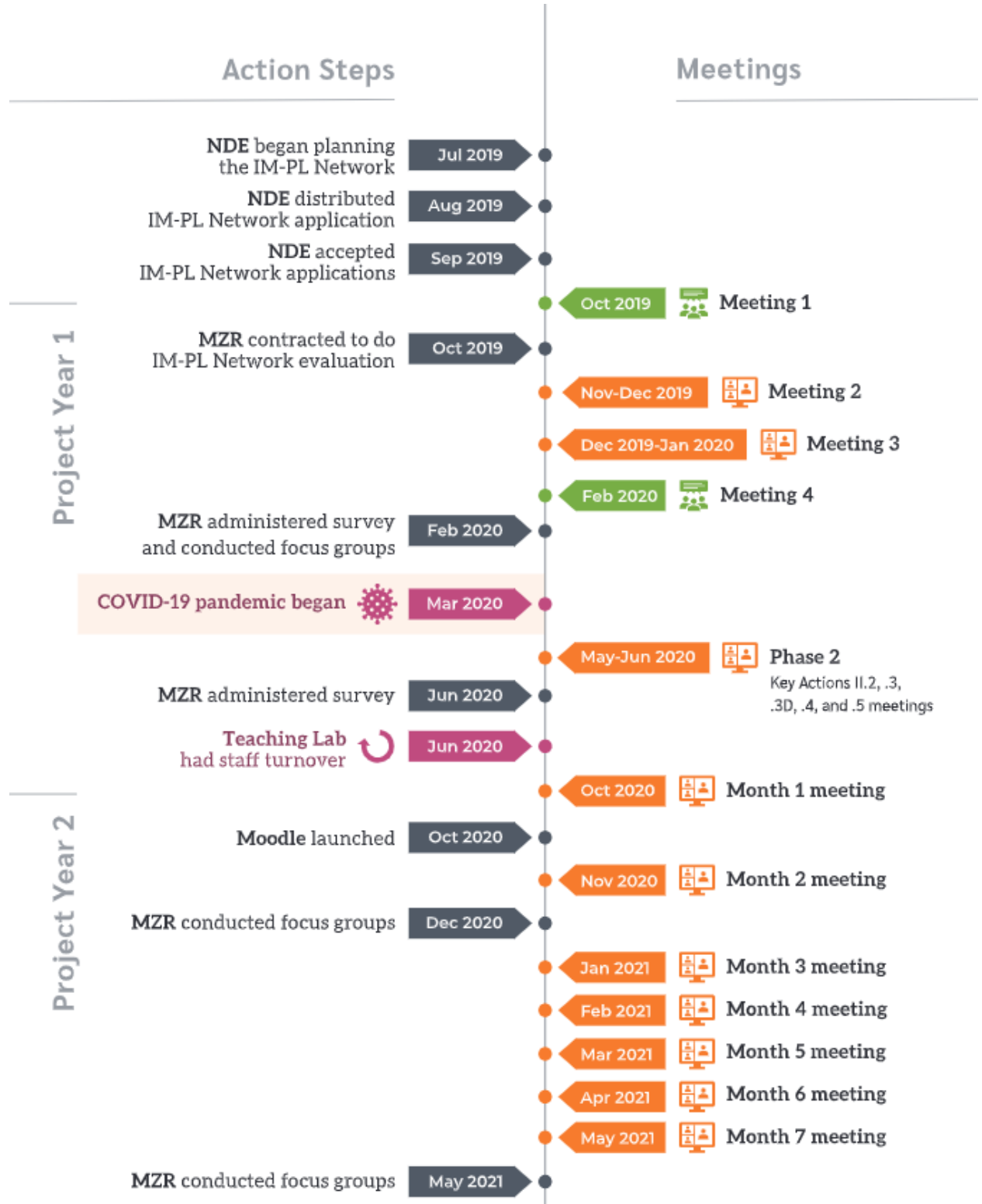
the content of the meetings shifted to reflection on, rather than application of, the Teaching Lab process. As a result, the Year 2 content was less focused on the implementation of Phase 3.

- Cohort members highlighted equity as a topic of interest with two subcategories: (1) ensuring HQIM teams included the appropriate members, and (2) striving toward ensuring HQIMs were equitable for all students.

Differences Between Years 1 and 2:

- The IM-PL Network was different from Year 1 to Year 2. This is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic altering the meeting format from a mix of in-person and virtual meetings to only virtual meetings, as well as to Teaching Lab staff turnover between Years 1 and 2. Additional aspects influenced by these contexts include the following: o The introduction of a learning management system (Moodle).
- A loss of coherence between asynchronous and synchronous work.
- A shift from applying the Teaching Lab process in Year 1 to reflecting on the process in Year 2.
- From Year 1 to Year 2, there was a decrease in cohort membership. Also, no cohort members in Phase 3 participated in the December 2020 or May 2021 focus groups.
- In Year 2, data collection became a cooperative effort between Marzano Research and Teaching Lab. The Teaching Lab collected survey data and provided it to Marzano Research rather than Marzano Research designing surveys for each phase of the process.

Action Steps | Meetings

NDE began planning the IM-PL Network — Jul 2019

NDE distributed IM-PL Network application — Aug 2019

NDE accepted IM-PL Network applications — Sep 2019

Oct 2019 — Meeting 1

MZR contracted to do IM-PL Network evaluation — Oct 2019

Nov-Dec 2019 — Meeting 2

Dec 2019-Jan 2020 — Meeting 3

Feb 2020 — Meeting 4

MZR administered survey and conducted focus groups — Feb 2020

COVID-19 pandemic began — Mar 2020

May-Jun 2020 — Phase 2
Key Actions II.2, .3, .3D, .4, and .5 meetings

MZR administered survey — Jun 2020

Teaching Lab had staff turnover — Jun 2020

Oct 2020 — Month 1 meeting

Moodle launched — Oct 2020

Nov 2020 — Month 2 meeting

MZR conducted focus groups — Dec 2020

Jan 2021 — Month 3 meeting

Feb 2021 — Month 4 meeting

Mar 2021 — Month 5 meeting

Apr 2021 — Month 6 meeting

May 2021 — Month 7 meeting

MZR conducted focus groups — May 2021

Project Year 1

Project Year 2

3.2.3 Potential next steps for the education innovation networks

- Using the evaluation findings to inform how future Education Innovation Networks function, including the differentiation of meeting content and activities based on where school districts are in each network's area of focus.
- Ensuring alignment of future networks with statewide education initiatives to portray a cohesive vision to school districts and ESUs.
- Applying an in-person or hybrid format for the Education Innovation Networks. This aligns with the emphasis on the collaborative strength of the network and gives members a designated time and place to work away from distraction.
- Integrating content into resources and meetings that is directly applicable to Education Innovation Network implementation. The networks should prioritize application over reflection.
- Infusing equity discussions into future Education Innovation Network cohorts.

3.3 Expanded learning opportunities (ELO)
3.3.1 About

The vision for the ELO Innovation Network is to create a new public-private partnership that leverages public funds to 1) provide more opportunities for key state level partners to work closely with new and established ELO programs to grow high quality, locally sustainable initiatives that can serve thousands of Nebraska youth, including youth from Nebraska's most challenging urban and rural educational environments, and 2) to identify and cultivate characteristics of high quality programming that can be shared with other communities across the state through a variety of in-person and online platforms. This nationally unique ELO Innovation Network will create new opportunities for Beyond School Bells to cultivate new local, state and national partnerships that can sustain the Network beyond the two-year Innovation Grant start-up phase.

2021-2024: Budget $250,000/year x 3 years = $750,000 over three years.

3.3.2 Progress

Despite the challenges of COVID in supporting school-based, community-powered afterschool and summer programs, we were able to make substantial progress in developing new and enhancing existing Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) programs across the state. Given the challenges communities faced, especially in starting up new initiatives during the pandemic, we expanded our work to include support for existing ELO programs in areas of the state that were being impacted by COVID-19 – communities with large populations of low income and minority youth. During the grant period, we were also able to support the development of a new afterschool and summer curriculum and launched a new resource, the ELO Design Center, that has provided direct support to communities across the state. Because of these challenges of implementing this work during the pandemic, we were given a contract extension until December 31, 2022. The State Board has also provided an additional $250,000 in Lottery fund proceeds in 2022 to leverage these new federal

ESSER III funds and to stimulate local public / private funding opportunities to support the expansion of the ELO Innovation Network and serve more NE communities.

In addition to the interim evaluation, we developed and are continually refined **Toolkit** https://bsbtoolkit.com/, a free on-line tool to help NE communities that are involved in starting, growing and seeking to sustain high quality afterschool and summer programs. It is currently being redesigned to support the roll out of the ESSER III grant program.

3.3.3   Potential for replication and scalability

Despite these challenges, the launch of the ELO Innovation Network in 2020 provided us with an important opportunity to test new concepts in programming, staffing and expanding ELO programs across the state. Importantly, the launch of the Network created a platform that we are currently using to facilitate the launch of NDE's $11,000,000, three-year, ESSER III funded grant program to support both afterschool and summer programming. The ELO Innovation Network, when combined with this new ESSER III funding, has provided us with an opportunity to reach out to philanthropic sector partners to facilitate additional public-private partnerships leading to more investments in ELO programs across the state. The new public-private partnership will create additional momentum around this work, leading to potential replication across the state.

The timing of this project was fortuitous – by launching the ELO Innovation Network we were in a position to respond to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that otherwise would not have been possible. We have currently raised $1,650,000 dollars to leverage the Federal and state investments in this work and anticipate being able to continue to raise additional funds to support this work over the upcoming three-year period

3.4   Data Visualization and Use
3.4.1   About

This Education Innovation Network builds upon the work of the Digital Ecosystem and focuses specifically on Data Visualization and Use for continuous school improvement.

This Education Innovation Networks will provide an opportunity for interested districts to apply for future competitive grants pursuant to §79-1054 for participation in the established Networks and become involved in building, supporting, and scaling innovations, as well as statewide implementation strategies, and enabling policy recommendations to support systemic improvement.

2021-2024:   Budget: $750,000/year x 3 years = $ 2.25 million over three years

3.4.2   Progress

The first Cohort of School District and ESU staff have gone through the Data Visualization and Use Network training. This training consisted of sessions where the staff learned how to use powerful data tools to set strategic goals and improve educational outcomes. Once these sessions concluded, this group continued meeting in monthly open discussion sessions to continue sharing lessons learned amongst themselves. This group is also providing feedback to the NDE on

suggested updates and enhancements to NDE-supplied visualizations, and the prioritization of these items. Cohort 2 of the network will soon be identified, and their training will occur from March through May of 2022.

3.5 Equitable software access and digital resources innovation network

3.5.1 About

This Education Innovation Network includes school districts and educational service units working together and with the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council (ESUCC) as the primary contractor to develop and maintain a portfolio of innovative digital tools and resources. Identifying a core set of prioritized applications will be selected for focus. For each selected need, a steering committee of actively interested members will be assembled. These steering members will represent diverse perspectives on the project, such as large vs. small districts or an instruction vs. technical vs. administrative role. The steering committee will research the area of need and explore, evaluate possible solutions, and may engage others to provide additional insight and information.

The Software Innovation Network focuses on refining the process of determining needs, evaluating software solutions, implementing, training, sustaining, evaluating and recognizing the end-of-life of software projects. Through cooperative software development, evaluation and licensing we help to address currently unmet needs. The *Software Innovation Network* will review, revise and improve current practices to provide high-quality software and features to students, educators and administrators:
- by being highly attentive to meeting Nebraska-specific needs and use cases
- at a low, sustainable cost
- with equitable statewide access
- while raising the level of data privacy and security protections

Estimated amount unspent for use through December 31, 2022: $650,000

3.5.2 Progress

We have convened a high-powered group of minds to validate the principles of the network and needs. While setback by the COVID-19 pandemic, documenting and refining the process of the Software Innovation Network continues.

Working with the team for the Future Ready Digital Learning Collaborative (FRDLC), the software implementation process will be put into practice and tested through several implementations during 2022, including a cyber security awareness, training and anti-phishing tool, multi-factor authentication solution, and software inventory and management system. All of these products were identified as needs by and for school districts through survey and interview processes.

3.5.3 Potential for replication and scalability

The Software Innovation process is needed now more than ever with the accelerated investments in software tools expected over the next few years due to additional one-time relief resources

provided due to the pandemic. The principles apply to software across three emerging areas of investment: Digital Equity and Broadband; Data Access, Analytics and Visualization; and Digital Teaching and Learning.

The network plans to continue documenting, refining and testing the Software Innovation process in coordination with leaders of software projects.

A 3-year, high-level budget includes:
Staffing (1 FTE, 3 years): $375,000
Meeting and office expenses: $30,000
3-year TOTAL: $405,000

4   Looking ahead

As each of the grantees moves towards success through realizing their respective project goals, the past three years of innovation has led way to new ideas and spurred important learnings that are now time to be implemented at a much larger and wider scale. With inspiration from these successful projects and important takeaways, it is time to take innovation to the next level. For the true scalability of these success methods, the approach was to invert the system through collaboration and partnership with agency-wide offices, specialists, community engagement and past grantees leading the way to the Education Innovation Networks (EIN).

The following are Education Innovation Networks proposed for the 2019-2021 years and the remaining available lottery resources allotted to the Innovation Grant Fund from the Education Improvement Fund. The primary goal of the Education Innovation Networks is to take the innovation work and subsequent efforts and scale or engage a broader set of districts and ESU's. The theory of action is essential to move the local innovation to more districts, locations, and experiences. Providing a competitive application process to participate in the variety of Networks ensures an opportunity for school districts and ESU's and also provides an opportunity for the Network to provide stability and explore sustainability approaches for carrying forth the innovation work in Nebraska Education.

Based on data and scalable innovation grant findings, five areas became the Education Innovation Networks that align with priorities of the legislature and State Board of Education. The innovation networks include (1) **Data Visualization and Use Network** to support the effective use of data and providing appropriate and useful visualization tools essential to inform educators**; (2) Instructional Materials Network** focuses support through collaboration and process of selecting and implementing high-quality instructional materials in Nebraska schools**; (3) Equitable Access and Digital Resources Innovation Network** Specializing in the sustainable delivery, implementation, and development of high impact software while also monitoring and evaluating the use of these tools and systems across school districts and ESU's while evaluating statewide licensing options in the process instilling the industry-standard best practice of data handling**; (4) Asynchronous Professional Learning Network** will build the quality standards, skills, knowledge, and processes for quality digital professional learning in Nebraska. The Network brings together educators from districts, ESUs, and NDE to establish processes, develop skills to deploy online asynchronous courses and training, resulting in a support network for successful innovation and personalized learning; and finally **(5) The Nebraska Expanded Learning Opportunity Innovation Network (ELO)** is the culmination of a successful collaboration in the NDE Innovation Grant funded Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) Design Challenge, partnering with Beyond School Bells, together with a group of key partners, will create the

Nebraska's ELO Innovation Network for the two-year period starting in January 2020. The two-year total public investment request ($400,000 annually in Innovation grant funds) generate a nearly 2:1 private-sector match, creating a total, two-year pool of over $2.0 million to launch and grow a Network supporting through an ELO Design Studio, developing and disseminating low cost, high quality, ELO programming, staffing and evaluation innovations, a new ELO incubator program supporting underserved rural and NDE priority school districts and ELO Centers of Excellence promoting and sharing ELO Innovations.

Education Innovation Networks (EIN) will carry forward ideas and priorities of the original Nebraska Innovation Grant Program into the future and continue to foster value at the classroom, school, district, and community levels through different capacity-building efforts. The systemic nature ensures access to the small and large, rural, urban or suburban districts and ultimately creates an opportunity to support the legislature's vision to improve education in Nebraska through the use of lottery resources.

5 Attachments
- Innovation network - Preliminary evaluation report
- Instruction materials - Evaluation report