



Lessons learned in the 2015/2016 TLIF Funding Round

Some pointers for success in 2017



The most important lesson the TLIF panel has learnt from its experiences in the selection process is that the thinking, research and attention to detail from the initial stages through to implementation counts. Successful teams had done considerable background preparation to enable them to express their ideas concisely and convincingly. Time invested was reflected in the quality of proposals. They had:

- Used data from their own students to establish the need for the inquiry.
 - Applications that reported national data only and not evidence of need from their own students did not make a convincing case for funding.
- Done some preliminary reading of relevant literature so that they were aware of what had been done before in NZ and elsewhere. This allowed them to provide a persuasive research-supported rationale in relation to the project's potential to improve student learning, particularly in relation to priority learners.
- Identified supporting expertise. For example:
 - Early on their thinking, teams had engaged a person with classroom inquiry experience to support them to refine the focus of their project, and provide advice on the design and methodology;
 - The team had accessed other appropriate expertise (e.g. a team that had identified a specific need for culturally responsive practices designed their inquiry with relevant Māori and/or Pasifika expertise. Likewise if the team were considering a need in the area of mathematics they had met with a mathematics educator to discuss possible approaches).
- Gained the support of stakeholders (e.g. colleagues, principals, parents, kaumatua, and students). People whose expertise was needed or who were potentially affected by the project were part of discussions and were supportive.
 - The inquiry was aligned with organisational priorities.
 - The inquiry was worthy of busy teachers' time, and promised to make teachers' work more successful and satisfying.
 - They had considered sustainability. There was assurance that the team was stable and that if someone left the project there were strategies in place to ensure that the funded project would be well implemented.
- Sought to change teaching practice as well as student learning.
 - Teaching practices were directed towards genuine learner needs. Unsuccessful applications identified what they wanted students to be doing differently but did not consider what teachers might do differently to achieve their goals for their students.
- Worked with others to write and review their proposal.
 - Teams used an external expert to support their application and to review the draft against the TLIF selection criteria. All members of the inquiry team had an opportunity to contribute to and critique the proposal and project plan.
 - Larger scale inquiry across several sites had involved teachers from all the proposed organisations in the development of the ideas and the drafting of the proposal.
- Designed their inquiry to be responsive to emerging findings.
 - The design allowed teachers to 'learn as they go' and appeared likely to build their understandings and expertise.
 - As all inquiries are to some extent a process of "trial and error" the inquiry was designed to provide for ongoing opportunities for reflection, and for changing direction thoughtfully in light of the emerging evidence (something that is captured in the NZCER report, *Implementing inquiry: What can be learned from the Round One Teacher led Innovation Fund (TLIF) projects?*)

The smaller proposals, those applying for Category A and B funding, were more successful than the larger scale Category C projects. It is much more difficult to prepare a proposal for a large-scale project that addresses the selection criteria in a convincing way. In addition, the management of big projects requires considerable successful prior expertise and experience, and this needs to be considered when designing larger scale inquiries.

Features of strong and unconvincing Proposals are described below. (Note: examples are not from actual applications)

FEATURES OF STRONG PROPOSALS THAT ALIGNED WELL WITH THE TLIF CRITERIA	FEATURES OF PROPOSALS THAT DID NOT ALIGN WELL WITH THE TLIF EVALUATION CRITERIA
Overall inquiry focus	
<p>There was a clear ‘puzzle of practice’ out of which a question to investigate was clearly articulated. For example: <i>“What happens to the quality of student writing when Y7& 8 teachers use Google Docs to provide feedback?”</i> <i>“What happens to the reading comprehension of students in Y5&6 classrooms when we systematically differentiate teaching?”</i></p>	<p>There was no question identified or the question was unclear or not suitable for a teacher inquiry. For example: <i>“What are the reasons too many xxxx students are failing in New Zealand schools?”</i> <i>“Does success in sports translate into classroom achievement?”</i></p>
<p>Question/s were student focused and included data demonstrating identified student need (especially for priority learners). For example: <i>“What can we do to better support the transition to secondary school of students who are achieving below level 4 in reading, writing and Mathematics standards?”</i> <i>“How can we better support the transition of immigrant children to our school?”</i></p>	<p>The need for the project was not clearly identified and/or there was no data that demonstrated the need. For example: <i>“We want to implement a garden-to- table scheme”</i> Sometimes the team intended to implement a specific programme without demonstrating a need for this chosen approach. The purpose of these projects was training or implementation rather than inquiry as the driver for the project. For example: <i>“We want to train teacher aides to deliver XXXX Phonics package to improve students’ reading”</i></p>
<p>The project had an educational focus— i.e. teachers doing things differently for the benefit of learners, and focusing on the impact of their changed practice.</p>	<p>The prime focus was not on teachers changing their practice and working differently to benefit learners. For example: In projects exploring online delivery, the focus tended to be on using the hardware and/or software rather than on student learning. In other projects the development of assessment tools was the key activity. While small-scale contextually relevant data collection methods can be relevant (e.g. classroom observations) it is not the aim of the fund to develop new tools, particularly if reliable instruments are already available.</p>
<p>The team had done background thinking, reading, and discussion with others to indicate that the proposed teacher action had the potential to build on existing information and lead to improved student learning.</p>	<p>There was limited evidence that the team had accessed the ideas of anyone outside the group (e.g. read relevant literature, or talked to others with relevant expertise).</p>
Collaborative inquiry and practice	
<p>Teachers knew what they wanted to achieve as a result of the proposed project. For example:</p>	<p>It was not clear what the team wanted to achieve from their project.</p>

<p><i>“By ... we aim to lift student engagement and achievement in science in Yr10.”</i></p>	
<p>Proposal showed how teachers would be working together to address the identified puzzle of practice (i.e. a teacher-led inquiry).</p>	<p>Only one teacher was involved. The TLIF requires a minimum of three teachers and clear evidence of a collaborative approach. Teachers may have been listed, but the plan did not detail what it was that each would be doing.</p>
<p>The plan briefly identified the collective expertise required to carry out the project, and the roles that respective team members would play.</p>	<p>The plan did not make it clear who would be doing what within the proposed project.</p> <p>External experts were named but the plan did not outline what it was that they would do to support the teachers in the project.</p> <p>The project was to be led by an outside expert rather than by the teachers themselves. While outside experts can add to richness and rigor of the project the fund requires that they support teachers to carry out the project, not take it over.</p>
<p>Methodology and Design -</p>	
<p>The team provided a clear description of what project would look like in action.</p>	<p>It was not possible for the panel to understand what the project would look like in action.</p>
<p>The project appeared to be manageable within the proposed time frame.</p>	<p>The scale of the project was too big or too small for the proposed time frame.</p>
<p>The budget appeared to be appropriate to the scope and scale of the proposed project.</p>	<p>The budget did not appear to be aligned with the scope of the project. The amount applied for was either excessive or insufficient for what was proposed.</p>
<p>All costs were included in the budget, i.e. time for teachers to carry out their responsibilities, breakdown of activities and costs of contracted external experts, resources etc</p>	<p>Costs were not itemised sufficiently.</p>
<p>Impact- monitoring and evaluation</p>	
<p>The team identified several sources of data it might collect to show changes in teacher practices and student learning.</p>	<p>Data was limited to a single source (e.g. standardised tests only). The data sources proposed were insufficiently robust to determine impact.</p>
<p>The team showed how it intended to make sense of what the data was telling them during the project. For example: <i>“Analyse the results of brief student surveys to determine the impact of the project on them and their learning”</i> <i>“ Collectively analyse graphs and tables showing shifts in student achievement each term”</i></p>	<p>There was no on-going organisation and discussion of data, which would not allow teams to reflect and be responsive to possible changes.</p>

An example of a process that a school might follow in designing an Inquiry

What is our puzzle of practice?	Thirty percent of students entering year 9 are below Level 4 in reading and writing (the target learners). At the end of year 9 those in the lowest quartile typically remain in this quartile.
What would we like to see at the end of the project? What is our aim?	Achieve at least a year's growth in reading and writing for target learners. Achievement data in Social Studies will show that students are enjoying and achieving better results over a specified time.
What existing difficulties might contribute to the problem?	No collective focus on reading and writing in curriculum areas? Variability in teacher expertise? Insufficient opportunities for students to read and write? Not all teachers know how to use assessment to support all learners?
Specific student population	All Year 9 English and Social studies classes (2017). All Year 9 and 10 English, Social studies classes (2018).
What might we need to do to achieve our goals?	Identify teacher/s that have demonstrated expertise in literacy and are willing to use their ideas to support the development of collective expertise in their colleagues. Engage outside expert to support teachers to effective literacy practices. Access facilitated e- asTTle training and support. Build collective understandings about what a year's progress should look like in reading and writing in English and Social Studies. Build collective understandings about effective literacy practices. Develop ten week cycles of teaching/ evaluation to collectively evaluate changes in teacher practices and impacts on student learning.
What is our research/inquiry question?	Can the development and use of collective teacher expertise accelerate the engagement and achievement of targeted Year 9 learners in reading, writing and Social Studies? (2017). How can English and Social Studies teachers build on their understanding of effective literacy practices to accelerate the engagement and achievement of targeted Year 9 and 10 learners? (2018).
What data might we collect?	e-asTTle Reading and Writing Beginning of 2017, 2018, 2019. Analysis of student assessments in Social Studies and English each year.

In Summary

Strong Proposals demonstrated:

- a well-articulated puzzle of practice, supported with relevant evidence in terms of the needs of the target students;
- clearly identified inquiry question(s); a focus on shifting teaching practices, testing new practices and student learning and using relevant data collection to measure the anticipated shifts;
- good use of appropriate external expertise, relevant to the context; and
- A detailed Project Plan that made it clear who was doing what, when and why; and a budget that clearly aligned with the project plan.



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