

## **Race to the Top Assessment Program Review Guide** *as of August 2011*

### **Background**

In September 2010, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the U.S. Department of Education (Department) funded two consortia of states to develop next-generation assessments through the Race to the Top Assessment (RTTA) program: the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The two consortia are developing assessment systems that are valid, reliable, and fair for their intended purposes and for all student subgroups; support and inform instruction; provide accurate information about what students know and can do; and measure student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace. These assessment systems are intended to play a critical role in educational systems; provide administrators, educators, parents, and students with the data and information needed to continuously improve teaching and learning; and help meet the President's goal of restoring, by 2020, the nation's position as the world leader in college graduates.

In order to provide integrated support and oversight to the consortia, the grants are governed by a Cooperative Agreement between the Department and the grantee. The agreement provides for substantial communication, coordination, and involvement between the Department and the grantee to ensure the success of the grant. Consistent with this agreement, the Department has developed an RTTA program review process that not only addresses the Department's responsibilities for fiscal and programmatic oversight but that provides targeted technical assistance and support to the RTTA grantees throughout the life of the grant.

This guide summarizes the overall structure of the RTTA program review and provides specific descriptions of each program review aspect. The program review emphasizes the outcomes of the grants and the quality of implementation rather than focusing solely on a compliance-driven approach focused on inputs and discrete tasks. The review process includes:

1. On-going, but at least monthly, conversations between the Department and the grantee;
2. On-site program reviews;
3. Stocktake meetings with the grantee and senior leaders in the Department; and
4. Annual performance reports.

Annually, the Department will conduct each of the aspects listed above for each grantee. The Department will work with the grantee to schedule the various aspects of the program review, to the extent possible, at mutually agreeable times.

The Department expects the consortium to regularly update the Department in a timely fashion should any significant change occur that impacts the grantee's approved plan. That is, the grantee should not wait until a regularly scheduled time to alert the Department to a proposed significant change or problem associated with the grant.

### **Program Review Aspects**

For each aspect of the RTTA program review, the Department has established a set of protocols to guide the review and clarify the process and timeline. The protocols outline the essential information the Department will require for its review of RTTA grantees. In each case, the protocols are tied directly to the applications, the absolute priority, the competitive priority, and/or the Cooperative Agreement.

### ***Progress Updates***

In the monthly progress updates, the grantee provides detailed information regarding the implementation of its approved application and workplan. Prior to the discussion, the grantee submits a monthly progress update to the Department that provides a general update on the status of the implementation of its RTTA plan. These updates include a description of the activities implemented since the previous communication, activities scheduled to occur in the next month, any challenges or questions for the Department, and topic about which the grantee would like the Department to provide technical assistance. The Department may also identify specific agenda items or activities on which it would like additional information. During the monthly calls, the Department and grantee discuss the consortium's progress against its timelines, benchmarks, and outcomes in the consortium's approved plan.

### ***On-site Program Review***

Through the annual on-site review, a consortium demonstrates its progress both in developing and implementing innovative assessment systems and compliance with accountability and oversight requirements, including fiscal, reporting, and sub-recipient monitoring requirements. Through the on-site review protocol, the consortium provides a self-assessment of its progress toward successfully developing a fully functional assessment system and information necessary to demonstrate adherence to all grant requirements. The on-site program review provides an in-depth, comprehensive review of each aspect of the grantee's progress toward developing a fully operational assessment system in English language arts and mathematics.

### ***Annual Performance Report (APR)***

Each grantee will complete an annual performance report, which provides specific information on the grantees' progress in meeting key indicators for both the RTTA absolute priority (development of a fully functional, innovative assessment system) and competitive preference priority (collaboration and alignment with higher education). The APR will be a report of the grantee's outcomes to date, its performance against the measures established in its application, and other relevant data. The Department will use the APR to inform on-going program technical assistance as well as to provide Congress and the public with detailed information regarding each consortium's progress on meeting the goals outlined in its application. The APRs will be posted on the Department's website.

### ***Stocktake Meetings***

The stocktake meetings are annual, data-based conversations between the grantee and Department leadership to discuss program implementation and identify successes and challenges. The discussions are informed by the consortium's workplans, monthly progress updates, on-site program review, APR, and other relevant qualitative and quantitative data, as available. The meetings provide opportunities for each consortium to develop concrete plans for addressing areas of concern and identify ways the Department can assist the consortium in addressing these concerns. Though they may address some of the same general topics as the on-site program review, the stocktake is an opportunity for senior leaders at both the consortium and the Department to converse and provide two-way feedback on progress.

### **Grant Management and Comprehensive Race to the Top Assessment Annual Report**

The Department uses the grantee's responses during monthly calls, evidence gathered through the on-site program review, supporting documentation (e.g., information about consortium-specific meetings and products), the APR, and the stocktake meeting to assess the grantee's progress toward developing fully functional, innovative assessment systems. The Department also uses this overall review of grantee progress in their assessment system development to identify areas for additional support and technical assistance.

Based on this analysis, the Department will produce an annual comprehensive RTTA report, which is an overview of the progress made to date by each of the consortia. Consistent with statutory requirements, this report will be used to inform Congress and other stakeholders about the progress of the RTTA grantees, summarize trends across grantees, highlight successes and accomplishments, identify common challenges, and provide lessons learned from implementation. The annual comprehensive RTTA report will be posted on the Department's web site.