

RACE TO THE TOP



3/2/2010

Reviewer Training and Orientation Report

Overview

As part of the Race to the Top grant competition, the US Department of Education hosted a day-long training for peer reviewers on Saturday January 23, 2010 at the Holiday Inn Capitol Hill in Washington DC. The purpose of the training and orientation day was to provide Race to the Top grant reviewers with an overview of the selection criteria, requirements, and priorities in the grant application, as well as to orient them to the review process, confidentiality and conflict of interest issues, and reviewer guidelines and expectations. Reviewers also had the opportunity to ask questions of Department of Education staff and the contractors responsible for establishing and maintaining the web-based Application Review System.

On January 28, 2010 a follow-up webinar was held for reviewers to walk through the on-line Application Review System (ARS). During this webinar, reviewers were shown the ARS, how to log-in, how to enter scores and comments and how to save and print. Reviewers were also shown where to check for messages from panel monitors within the system. Eight reviewers participated in the webinar.

RACE TO THE TOP REVIEWER TRAINING SURVEY RESULTS

A link to an electronic survey was sent to all participants at the Race to the Top Training and Orientation Day. All responses were anonymous. See Appendix A for the full survey.

General Findings

All of the respondents reported satisfaction with the training session overall. More than half (51.85%) of respondents were very satisfied and the remaining 48.15% were satisfied. None of the reviewers reported being dissatisfied with the training.

Respondents

Twenty-seven of the 58 reviewers and alternates who attended the training session responded to the survey, a 46.5% response rate.

Survey Responses

The overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) reported that the training was a valuable use of their time. Similarly, 97% of the respondents reported that they left the workshop with a good sense of how to proceed in reviewing applications. One respondent strongly disagreed with the statement.

Eighty percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the answers they received to questions were helpful. One respondent disagreed and four others were neutral. Eighty-one percent responded that their questions were answered clearly. One respondent disagreed with the statement that his/her questions were answered clearly.

The one area in which respondents were somewhat less satisfied was amount of time spent on each topic. While 70% of the respondents thought the amount of time for the training was sufficient, 15% disagreed and another 15% were neutral. The vast majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed (89%) that the training covered the right topics and information. Seventy-two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the topics were covered clearly. All respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the information they received before coming on site to the training. The vast majority (81%) of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the materials that were provided. While the vast majority of participants were satisfied with the registration process and the room and hotel facilities, 11% percent and 18% of respondents were dissatisfied, respectively.

Survey Comments

Overall, the majority of the reviewers who responded to the survey reported that the training was a valuable use of their time and that they left with a good sense of how to proceed with their reviews. The comments reflected some frustration with the hotel and with the training registration process. In general, the respondents were satisfied with the materials they received and with the pace and content of the day. A few of the respondents requested additional information on how alternates were selected. Two reviewers would have liked additional information on how to review the budgets that were presented in the applications.



U. S. Department of Education
Promoting educational excellence for all Americans

RACE TO THE TOP PEER REVIEWER TRAINING

Survey Statistics

Note: Percentages may not always total 100 percent due to rounding.

1. At this time, are you a _____?

Reviewer	(16) 59.26%
Alternate	(11) 40.74%

2. How satisfied were you, overall, with the training session:

Very Satisfied	(14) 51.85%
Satisfied	(13) 48.15%
Unsatisfied	(0) 0.00%
Very Unsatisfied	(0) 0.00%

3. For the following statements, please respond accordingly:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Overall this event was a valuable use of my time.	(0) 0.00%	(0) 0.00%	(1) 3.70%	(5) 18.52%	(21) 77.78%
The amount of time spent on each topic was sufficient.	(0) 0.00%	(4) 14.81%	(4) 14.81%	(7) 25.93%	(12) 44.44%
The workshop covered the right topics and information.	(0) 0.00%	(0) 0.00%	(3) 11.11%	(9) 33.33%	(15) 55.56%
The topics were covered clearly.	(0) 0.00%	(2) 8.00%	(5) 20.00%	(7) 28.00%	(11) 44.00%
The questions I had were answered clearly.	(0) 0.00%	(1) 3.70%	(4) 14.81%	(8) 29.63%	(14) 51.85%

The answers to my questions were helpful.	(0) 0.00%	(0) 0.00%	(5) 19.23%	(8) 30.77%	(13) 50.00%
Overall I left the workshop with a good sense of how to proceed in reviewing applications.	(1) 3.70%	(0) 0.00%	(2) 7.41%	(8) 29.63%	(16) 59.26%

4. Please offer any comments that might clarify or expand on your answers to the above questions. (Constructive criticism and compliments are both welcome!) I

thought the entire workshop/training was outstanding. The materials provided were of exactly the right level of specificity. I have found the powerpoints and notebook of materials to be extremely helpful as I work on my reviews. I appreciate that you gave us those materials as well as the proposals in hard copy. I know how much work that must have been and also how much it complicated the logistics of sending us the materials but I can't imagine doing the reviews without the hard copies. (Of course, right now I'm a bit overwhelmed about doing the reviews in the next 10 days!)

2. Some suggestions on approaching a 600+ page document might have been helpful in overcoming being overwhelmed. Some topics, in particular charter schools, were very complex and could have used more time. The standards section could have been dealt with more forthrightly; all states that entered are part of the consortium for development so that is 20 points. Overall, the entire RttT grant program is phenomenally well thought out and the evaluation process is as well. Kudos to all!
3. ED staff were very thoughtful in designing the review process and did an excellent job of explaining the details of the work.
4. What would have been more helpful to me would have been to start "at the end." Begin by having us try to score a section of a sample proposal and write statements to justify our scoring. My management style is that of a driver who likes the bottom line first. All of the day would have made more sense to me had I realized sooner exactly what we were going to be expected to do. Perhaps many of the participants have experience reviewing and understood the details you were sharing. I know that you had a lot to cover, but sometimes the speakers went awfully fast. Perhaps it was the lack of sleep, too. I think it would have helped if we could have just discussed the whole thing with people at our table. You have such a horrendous task that there's probably no way to satisfy everyone.
5. It is clear that an enormous amount of time and thought went into planning the day. The organization and materials were outstanding. Folks worked hard and it showed. BUT it is truly not acceptable to stand and read powerpoints to people hour after hour after hour. Saying you know this is inappropriate does not let you off the hook. It does not matter that there was a lot to cover. No one can absorb and process information at that rate. How about, instead, you send out summaries ahead of time that we read on our own, do a brief review, and then have folks actually practice with a mock application. Take us all the way through. Let us get on line and input scores. That is just one way things might have been done differently. As much as I understand and appreciate the pressure you felt and the work and organization and effort, the day was not what it could have been.
6. I am still not certain how much effort we should put into evaluating the budgets. I know our opinions are highly valued on quality of the content but not about how important our analysis of budgets is to the process.
7. The training was good, but rushed. This really needed two days.

8. The logistics were not helpful--staff did not seem prepared to handle the many formsw and tasks--they seemed confused and were at times misleading in directions.
9. Presenters had well constructed presentations and good answers to almost all questions. The one exception might be the confidentiality aspect. As was pointed out, it may be necessary at some point to explain our absence to supervisors or co-workers, tips on how to best handle that could have been better prepared.
10. I think Miko did a great job with the logistics.
11. It would have been helpful to know I was an alternate before the date of the training. Also, it would have been helpful to know the criteria used to determine who would be a reviewer and who would be an alternate. This led to some confusion during the early part of the training that could have been prevented by better up-front communication.
12. Extremely well done and well organized. JoAnn Weiss is amazing!! She has a real gift for patience and explaining things. I am thrilled these folks are serious about only Race to the Top, not Race to the Middle. I feel honored to be a part of the process.
13. Joanne Weiss was masterful in anticipating and responding to questions and issues raised...appreciated her focus on details and clarity but at the same time providing strong rationale for decisions made and connecting the dots to a bigger picture.
14. The presenters were well prepared, articulate, and conveyed the information in an understandable way. Allowing for questions during the presentation was helpful to everyone. It would have been good to have had an additional couple of hours (perhaps by adding time the night of arrival for introductions and registration) so that there would be time to practice using the system with some samples.
15. The content of the portfolio-binder was comprehensive, easy to understand, and carefully articulated by staff presenters.
16. While I believe the DOE is to be commended for doing an outstanding job (preparation coordination and training binder), the amount of time dedicated to training was limited. The last topics received very little time and questions were cut short. The training had more than enough material and is serious work to warrant more than a day.
17. There was a lot of information to review and overall you did a good job of pacing the session and making sure it was all covered and we were finished on time.
18. Joanne was consistently good - others could have been clearer, talked more slowly. The length and intensity of the session reduced the "value" of information toward the end of the day.
19. While we needed to hear from the attorneys, there weren't fully transparent. Obviously, protecting the reviewers from the media is a good answer, but a tad more transparency about problems that have arisen from internal department and reviewer conflicts would have made the presentation more credible -- since everyone in the room has been in education for a long time. In addition, someone with more media familiarity should have scripted something better than "no comment" as a response to media inquiries. If you want media referred to someone in DOE, tell the reviewers what to say. Beyond the media, for those of us who work, a lot of people (like supervisors and employers) do need to know where we are (even if on vacation) and especially if there may be conflict with the employer.

20. My questions were about state and NAEP assessments in science and maybe social studies, which should be explicit and central but are not in the documents. Also, many Alternative programs including TFA and Teacher Residencies are affiliating with IHE. There is just a hint that Independence is a higher state of bliss, because of the shortcomings of open admissions schools of ed. Arguable.
21. I liked the training and fully understand the review task at hand.
22. Fatigue set in the late PM.
23. Would have liked to have known how and why the alternatives were selected. Other than that, the criteria are clear and the trainers used humor well to make the day go quickly. My biggest concern for the department (and the President) is that the stuff on charter school laws and policies is too nuanced for the reviewers alone to really judge that work just based on what the states share. Hopefully, further thought is being given to how to ensure safeguards in that area.

5. Are there any additional training materials or information that you would like to have? If so, what?

1. Travel arrangements have been a bit difficult. Leaving at 3:00 on Friday of the next training session in February is going to be very difficult for me, in particular.
2. Feedback ASAP as we enter comments into the system would be helpful.
3. I would like to have printed examples of a well-developed review statement.
4. Perhaps some instructions about what to do with proposals that are difficult to read (no tabs and elements that overlap. Simple information like do we use the name of a state in justifications or are they kept anonymous? Could the manual you gave us be shortened and simplified?
5. You did a great job of anticipating almost everything. I did end up making myself a word version of the full rubric that I am working and scoring in, so that is the only thing I can think of. (I want to do two states before I input scores, but I may be the only person thinking this way.)
6. Please give me guidance on how much time and effort I should put into the budgets. There are huge amounts of materials to cover and unless I hear different, I intend to provide only general comments about the budgets.
7. The binder is quite helpful.
8. No--materials are fine
9. A word template document to use in reviewing the applications which would include the review criteria, possible points, and have places for entering points and comments. Reviewers would then copy comments from the word document to the on line application.
10. Some sample protocols for coming to consensus if reviewers' analyses show wide variance during the rating process.

11. I realize that confidentiality was a priority but it would have been helpful to know how reviewers were selected and determined to alternates or not. Since we did not get introductions nor background info on any reviewers, I would suggest that you provide at least a background profile of the group such as the number of practitioners, academicians, policy, business, etc.
12. Not at this time, but this answer could change if/when I move from alternate to reviewer.
13. A little more time could have been given to the procedures/protocols related to online recording of scores and comments by reviewers, but overall presentation was excellent.
14. An electronic copy of the materials/binder would have helped get a jump start when traveling.
15. Anticipate reviewers FAQ's, share prior to the session and potentially reduce the number of questions and thus the interruption (necessary though it was) of the flow of information.
16. Had there been time, it would have made sense to have a walk through an easy section (for rubric calibration) and one considered difficult, so the problems that are likely to be faced get a bit of handling before the weeklong meeting.
17. I believe the Alternates should be given some priority in the June-July Phase Two resubmit round. I was deeply disappointed, having applied directly last August, written books on school reform, taught at five universities etc. I understand why you had to be prepared for 50 states D.C. and the territories

6. How satisfied were you with the logistics and support?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Information provided to you prior to coming to the event	(0) 0.00%	(0) 0.00%	(9) 33.33%	(18) 66.67%
Registration process	(2) 7.41%	(1) 3.70%	(13) 48.15%	(11) 40.74%
Materials provided	(0) 0.00%	(1) 3.70%	(11) 40.74%	(15) 55.56%
The room and hotel facilities	(1) 3.70%	(4) 14.81%	(14) 51.85%	(8) 29.63%

7. Please share with us any additional ways in which this event could have been improved.

1. The registration process was a bit disorganized but this is an overwhelming and monumental undertaking, so I don't think anyone was upset about the hick-ups. The guest rooms are great - for once, sufficient lighting and reading spaces!! The meeting room was a bit awkward, however. I couldn't see the other side of the room and missed connecting faces with names of some of the staff.
2. No fire drills at midnight would be good
3. I wish that you would flag your e-mails. I get so many and you are sending with different names. I could easily miss one. The sequence of events with airline reservations and hotel registering lacked a little clarity. All the arrangements were smooth though and the proximity to the airport was appreciated.
4. The room was fine, the food was good, people were very nice and very competent. Beyond your control is that I live locally and have to commute. The Saturday meeting helped! Lots less traffic for that day at least.
5. The only major complaint is that we just needed more time to work through the material. There were times when everything just felt rushed. It would have been useful for everyone to read a section and practice rating so that we would know how to calibrate our judgment and get the sense of the difference between a 15 out of 40 and a 25 out of 40, for example.
6. Prepare staff to support the overall effort--better facilities that facilitates interaction.
7. Hotel was not optimal due to the noisy teenagers on my hall at night and the fire alarm.
8. The registration process was somewhat chaotic and could have been improved by better up-front communication (see comments for #4, above). However, the training was excellent and thorough. The three pre-training documents were easy to understand and were supported throughout the actual training. Questions were welcome and got clear, logical responses that contributed to everyone's understanding. The review process should go extremely well because it appears to be well thought out.
9. The hotel is noisy, the hotel staff is less than courteous- a typical holiday inn.
10. I do a lot of traveling and I can't remember when I have had such a bad hotel experience and service. First, we should have been alerted to the large congregation of young people who prevented the use of common space and lack of quietness. Second, there was no staff present nor official announcements re the midnight alarm which disrupted the entire night's sleeping ability. The failure of any communication attempts and no apologies offered indicate poor management and clearly safety and security concerns. My second night's attempt at slumbering was interrupted by a faulty toilet flushing throughout the night so there was no sleep again...also the facility is old with poor and noisy temperature control system, uncomfortable bedding and rooms that are not well maintained. Please find a different venue for future events.
11. The location of the hotel was great, and the service was excellent. Although the hotel was very loud and the late night fire alarm was disturbing, I don't believe this could have been prevented.
12. In retrospect, it would have been nice to know in advance—even a little—regarding my designation as an alternate. I admit to considerable disappointment that I was not chosen as a reviewer for the first round. I am philosophic and still keenly hoping that I might still be involved. The Race to the Top initiative is incredibly important and I am deeply honored to be playing a part. [Name redacted].

13. In order to devote enough time to each application, the number of applications should be reduced to two or not more than three. The applications are complex, require attention to details and very time consuming for the given timelines.
14. I found the shape of the room was not conducive to the meeting-it would have been better to have a large rectangle instead of the L shaped room. Other than that all of the logistics and support were terrific! Great communication from Miko Group before hand with information and expectations.
15. Either content and logistical support needed to arrive and set things up around 6 am, or the meeting should have started later, because things weren't set up for registration, clearing people, etc. -- so there were loose ends. On the positive side, Miko and DOE folks managed to handle things with grace.
16. Hotel needs a PA system to handle fire drills. Very disorganized. FAQs and rubrics could have been sent out earlier. I found I could download and print them on my own.
17. I don't see needs for improvement to the training at this time. I am wondering about how the alternate status was designated and how it will work, i.e. whether or not I am going to be assigned to the summer phase or what to expect at this point in terms of possible work schedule, etc.
18. All was fine except the check-in. Obviously they needed more folks doing that, and more training on how to handle alternates. I was there first one and they didn't know what to do with me. Indeed, I wasn't even given the general training manual until I sought out someone at break to get one (so I sat there for the first 2 hours with no materials).
19. Better hotel with fewer teenagers. 2. Restrict or manage questions from reviewers better -- some people wasted our time with frequent, low quality questions. I appreciated Joanne's attempts to keep to the agenda.

Appendix A: Race to the Top Reviewer Training and Orientation Survey Questions



U. S. Department of Education
Promoting educational excellence for all Americans

Feedback Requested

Thank you so much for attending the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top Peer Reviewer Training. We want to ensure that the Department’s events serve our attendees well. If you have about 10 minutes to answer the questions below, we would greatly appreciate it.

1. At this time, are you a ?

- Reviewer
- Alternate

2. How satisfied were you, overall, with the training session:

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

3. For the following statements, please respond accordingly:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Overall this event was a valuable use of my time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The amount of time spent on each topic was sufficient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The workshop covered the right topics and information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The topics were covered clearly.

The questions I had were answered clearly.

The answers to my questions were helpful.

Overall I left the workshop with a good sense of how to proceed in reviewing application.

4. Please offer any comments that might clarify or expand on your answers to the above questions. (Constructive criticism and compliments are both welcome!)



5. Are there any additional training materials or information that you would like to have? If so, what?



6. How satisfied were you with the logistics and support?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Information provided to you prior to coming to the event	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Registration process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Materials provided	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The room and hotel facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please share with us any additional ways in which this event could have been improved.

Submit

Thank you for taking the time to help us improve these events in the future.