

## **Race to the Top Program Review Guide: Phases 1, 2 and 3**

### **Program Review Overview**

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. ARRA provided \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top fund, of which approximately \$4 billion was used to fund comprehensive statewide reform grants under the Race to the Top program.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) awarded Race to the Top Phase 1 and Phase 2 grants to 11 States and the District of Columbia. The Race to the Top program is a competitive four-year grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and improving high school graduation rates; and ensuring students are prepared for success in college and careers. In 2011, the Department awarded Phase 3 grants to seven additional States, which were finalists in the 2010 Race to the Top Phase 1 and Phase 2 competitions.

As part of the Department's commitment to supporting States as they implement ambitious reform agendas, the Department established the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU) in the Office of the Deputy Secretary to administer, among others, the Race to the Top program. The goal of the ISU is to provide assistance to States as they implement unprecedented and comprehensive reforms to improve student outcomes. Consistent with this goal, the Department has developed a Race to the Top program review process that not only addresses the Department's responsibilities for fiscal and programmatic oversight, but is also designed to identify areas in which Race to the Top grantees need assistance and support to meet their goals. Specifically, the ISU works with Race to the Top grantees to differentiate support based on individual State needs, and helps States work with each other and with experts to achieve and sustain educational reforms that improve student outcomes. In partnership with the ISU, the Reform Support Network (RSN) offers collective and individualized technical assistance and resources to Race to the Top grantees. The RSN's purpose is to support Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms. Grantees are accountable for the implementation of their approved Race to the Top plans, and the information and data gathered throughout the program review help to inform the Department's management and support of the Race to the Top grantees, as well as provide appropriate and timely updates to the public on their progress.<sup>2</sup>

This guide summarizes the overall structure of the Race to the Top program review for Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantees, as well as specific descriptions for each of the various program review components.

### **Program Review Components**

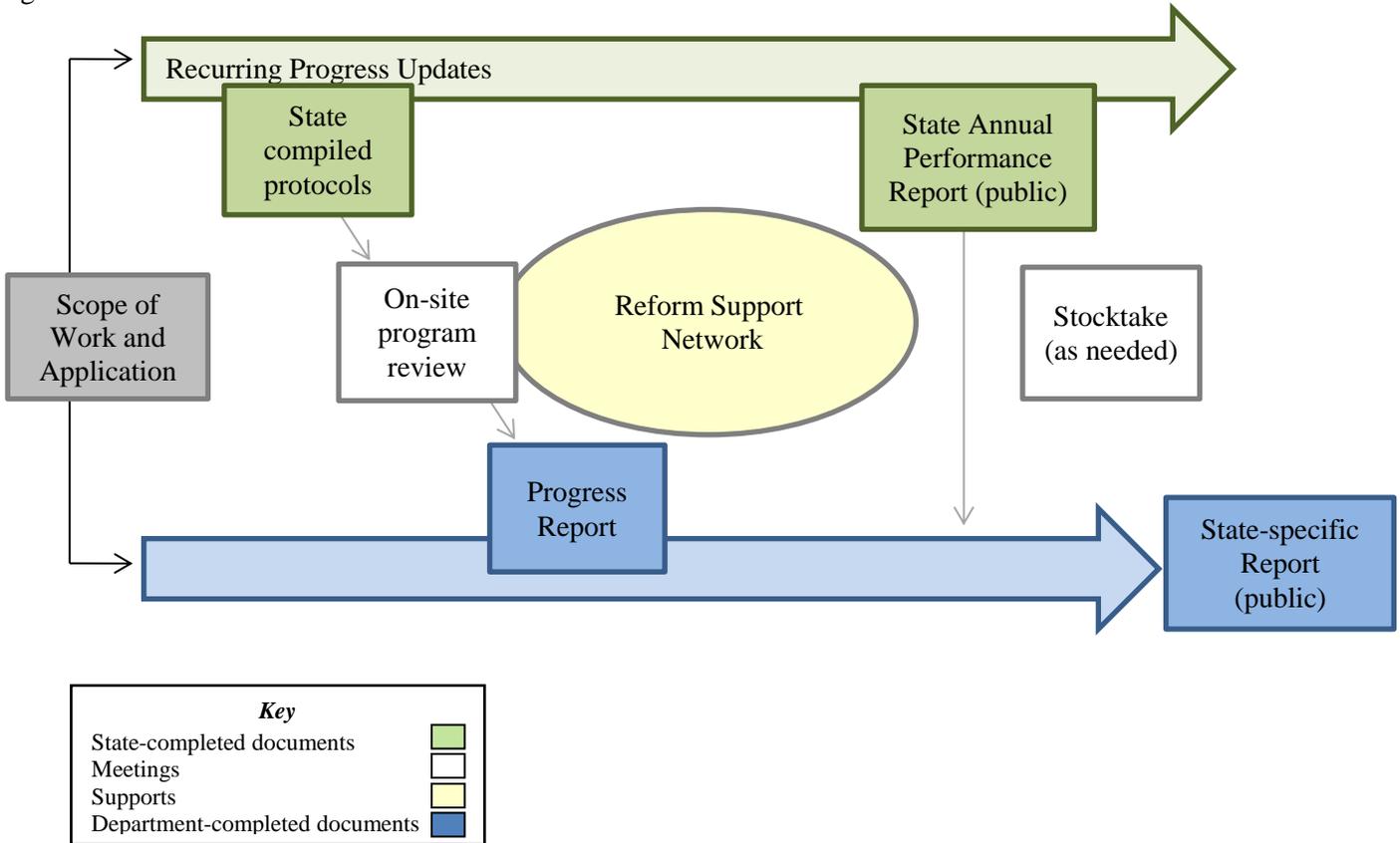
The program review is a new process that emphasizes outcomes and the quality of program implementation by States rather than being solely a compliance-driven approach focused on inputs and discrete tasks. The review process includes ongoing conversations between the Department and grantees, onsite program reviews, grantee self-evaluations, and periodic stocktake meetings with Department leadership. Grantees are asked to consider not only their progress on meeting timelines and managing their budgets but also their assessments of the quality of the implementation of their Race to the Top plans and their progress towards specific performance measures and goals. In addition, the ISU works closely with the RSN to ensure that the technical assistance provided to the Race to the Top States focuses on advancing States' reform efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> The remaining funds were awarded under the Race to the Top Assessment program. More information about the Race to the Top Assessment program is available at [www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment](http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the ISU's amendment process for Race to the Top Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantees, see the Grant Amendment Submission Process document at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/resources.html>. For more information on RSN, see <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/resources.html>.

The following flowchart and narrative provide an overview of the annual components of the Department’s program review of Race to the Top Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantees.<sup>3</sup> The review process will occur over the span of one year; an example of an annual process for Years 2 through 4 of the grant is provided below.<sup>4</sup> The Department will work with grantees to schedule the various components of the program review, to the extent possible, at mutually-agreeable times.



**Program review protocols**

The program review is comprised of two protocols, Progress Updates and Accountability and Oversight. These protocols outline the essential information the Department will require for its review of Race to the Top Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantees. The protocols are tied directly to the Race to the Top selection criteria and absolute priorities previously established and originally published in the Federal Register (<http://edicsweb.ed.gov>, ‘Race to the Top Program Review Protocols’ 04513 1894-NEW-v.1). Each protocol is described below.

**Progress Update protocol**

In the Progress Updates, a State provides detailed information regarding the implementation of its approved application and Scope of Work. A State submits a Progress Update to its program officer<sup>5</sup> that includes two components: (1) a general update on the status of the implementation of its Race to the Top plan (Progress Update – Part A) and (2) progress updates for aspects of their approved plan (Progress Update – Part B).<sup>6</sup> These updates include a description of the activities implemented to date, a review of the

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the annual program review cycle for Phase 3 grantees may differ slightly from Phase 1 and 2 grantees.

<sup>4</sup> Year 1 of the program review cycle is slightly different for Race to the Top Phase 1, 2 and 3 grantees.

<sup>5</sup> Each State works with a program officer in the Implementation and Support Unit as its primary contact at the Department.

<sup>6</sup> Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantees provide progress updates for each sub-criterion in their approval plans..

quality of implementation, an assessment of the progress made on performance measures, and the challenges in implementing each relevant sub-criterion. In addition to providing the Department with ongoing information on a State's progress against its performance measures and goals, the recurring submission of Progress Updates on multiple aspects of the State's plan reduces the burden on the State when compiling and updating the program review protocols for the onsite review. The Department uses this information, as well as conversations with grantees, to track State's progress against the timelines, benchmarks, and outcomes in the State's Scope of Work.

Race to the Top Phase 1 and 2 grantees provide Progress Updates on a monthly basis. Based on the activities outlined in the State's Scope of Work and application, the State works with its program officer to identify to which activities of the State's approved plan to discuss each month. In Year 4, the Department differentiated the frequency and content of the recurring Progress Updates based on grantee plans and progress. Phase 3 grantees provide Progress Updates on their entire approved plans on a quarterly basis.<sup>7</sup>

In preparation for the onsite program review, Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantees update (where applicable) information provided previously and submit supporting documentation for all sub-criteria. In addition, the State must identify critical milestones for each sub-criterion that are necessary for meeting relevant performance measures in each sub-criterion (Phase 1 and 2 grantees).

#### **Accountability and Oversight protocol**

States must demonstrate compliance with accountability and oversight requirements, including fiscal, reporting, and sub-recipient monitoring requirements. Through the Accountability and Oversight Protocol, States provide the necessary information to demonstrate compliance with all Federal requirements. The Department collects this information annually.

#### **Onsite program review**

The Department conducts an annual onsite program review of each Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantee. The purpose of this 3-5 day visit is to assess a State's progress in implementing its Race to the Top plan and achieving the goals described in that plan. During the onsite review, the Department uses the grantee's Progress Updates, supporting documentation, and evaluation of the quality of implementation to analyze and assess progress against performance measures and identify areas where the Department can provide support and technical assistance. The Department uses the information provided in the Accountability and Oversight protocol and any supporting documentation to determine whether the State is in compliance with all applicable Federal fiscal, reporting, and sub-recipient monitoring requirements.

The Department's primary objective during the onsite visit is to examine the State's implementation of its Race to the Top Scope of Work and its oversight and support of participating local educational agencies (LEAs). To gain a better understanding of how the State is implementing its Race to the Top plan, in addition to consulting with State leadership and teams, the Department speaks with representatives from approximately three participating LEAs or other relevant stakeholders to assess the impact of the State's Race to the Top reforms on instruction and student outcomes in schools and classrooms and discuss the State's management of the quality and progress of local implementation. These LEA interviews provide another perspective of the State's

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<sup>7</sup> While all Phase 3 grantees provide updates on their entire plan each quarter, the cadence of these submissions vary. Some Phase 3 grantees provide progress updates for a third of their plan each month while others provide updates on their entire plan once a quarter.

progress and help identify areas where the RSN might provide technical assistance to the State to support the effective implementation of its reform plans. The Department also meets with teachers and principals from schools within an LEA to discuss program implementation by the LEA and the effect of these reforms on classrooms and educators. (Teachers and principals participating in these discussions do not need to submit any information or documentation in preparation for the discussion.)

### **Progress Report**

The Department drafts a Progress Report that summarizes a State's performance to date; progress in meeting its benchmarks and timelines; features and characteristics of implementation to date; and next steps for the State and the Department. The Progress Report for each State is a dynamic document that is continuously revised based on new information, including updates from monthly Progress Updates, the onsite program review, and other relevant qualitative and quantitative data. The Department collaborates with the State to revise the Progress Report. Additionally, the Department includes the Accountability and Oversight report as an addendum to the Progress Report.

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

Each Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantee submits an Annual Performance Report (APR) on outcomes to date, its performance against the measures established in its application, and other relevant data. The Department uses the APR to inform the State-specific Reports. In addition, the Department uses data included in the APRs to provide Congress and the public with detailed information regarding each State's progress on meeting the goals outlined in its application. The final State APRs are posted on the Department's website at [www.apr-rtt.us](http://www.apr-rtt.us).

### **State-specific Report**

The State-specific Report is an annual comprehensive assessment of a State's Race to the Top implementation at a given point in time. The report highlights successes and accomplishments, identifies challenges, and provides lessons learned from implementation. The Department drafts this report incorporating information available from onsite program reviews, Progress Reports, ongoing conversations with the grantee, and State APRs. The Department provides the State with a draft for review and response. Once finalized, the Department posts the final State-specific Reports on its website.

The following activities will occur at the end of the Race to the Top grant period, or as necessary throughout the grant period.

### **Stocktake meetings**

The stocktake meetings are data-based conversations between the Race to the Top State and Department teams to discuss program implementation and identify successes and challenges that occur throughout the grant period. The discussions are informed by the State's Scope of Work, monthly progress updates, onsite program review, and other relevant qualitative and quantitative data, as available. The meetings provide an opportunity for the State to develop concrete plans for addressing areas of concern and identifying ways the Department can assist the State in addressing these concerns.

### **Comprehensive Race to the Top Report**

The Comprehensive Race to the Top Report is an overview of Race to the Top reform efforts across grantees. This report will be used to inform Congress and other stakeholders at the end of the Race to the Top grant period about the progress of the Race to the Top grantees, summarize trends and statistics across grantees, highlight successes and accomplishments, identify common

challenges, and provide lessons learned from implementation. This report will incorporate information provided from a variety of sources. The Department will post the final Comprehensive Race to the Top Report on its website.

**Transparency**

The Department makes public the following documents on its website for each Phase 1, 2, and 3 grantee:

- Approved Race to the Top Application
- State Scope of Work and all amendment decision letters
- State's Annual Performance Report (APR)
- State-specific Report

In addition, the Department will post the Program Review protocols, Program Review Guide, and Comprehensive Race to the Top Report on its website.