The U.S. Department of Education (Department) recently proposed the next round of its Race to the Top Program competition, this time for eligible school districts/local education agencies (LEAs). Awards will range from $15 million to $25 million depending on the size of the district, with a total of $400 million available for the program. The Department’s intent is to support the development of innovative, personalized teaching and learning models to promote college and career readiness outcomes for all students. States are not eligible to apply; however, depending on what LEA include in their applications, there may be potential conflicts to existing state laws, regulations, education-related policies, and education reform efforts—a point made by NASBE, the National Governors Association (NGA), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in a joint letter of comments/recommendations for the competition (see textbox). The Department is currently considering this and other comments from stakeholders and will release the final application for school districts in mid-to-late July. The application deadline will be in October and the Department will announce the grantees by December 31.

Priorities

The Department proposes five absolute priorities, of which applicants would be required to meet at least the first, and one of the remaining four in order to receive awards. The absolute priority for all applicants is personal learning environments.

LEAs must address how they will build on the four core assurance areas (college-and career-ready standards and assessments, comprehensive data systems, teacher and leader effectiveness, and school turnaround) to create student-centered learning environments through personalized strategies, tools, and supports for students and teachers; increasing the effectiveness of educators and expanding students’ access to the most effective educators; decreasing the achievement gap; and increasing rates at which students graduate from high school college and career-ready. The four core assurance areas as priorities are reflected in the prior rounds of the RTTT state competition.

LEAs must also apply as part of one of four sub-competitions (defined as separate absolute priorities) depending on whether

the given district(s) serving a majority of participating students is: 1) non-rural and an RTTT-State grantee; 2) rural and an RTTT-State grantee; 3) non-rural and NOT an RTTT-State grantee; or 4) rural and NOT an RTTT-State grantee. In other words, the Department is proposing four different competitions involving different districts, likely with different sub-pots of funds, depending on rural and RTTT status.

The Department proposes a competitive preference priority focused on public/private partnerships to support academic and social-emotional/family outcomes. Applicants can receive extra points by addressing this priority.

Eligibility Criteria

LEAs may apply individually or as part of a consortium across one or more states, but each LEA may sign on to only one application. LEAs can apply for all or a portion of their schools, for specific grades, or for specific subject/grade bands. LEAs also must meet the following requirements:

Joint Letter of Comments and Recommendations

The NASBE, NGA, and CCSSO joint letter to the Department concerning the competition made the following recommendations:

- District applications must be consistent with state laws and regulations;
- The competition should promote state and local partnerships;
- The competition should align with state efforts to implement other federal grant programs and initiatives;
- The competition must not pose additional requirements upon states;
- The competition should ensure rural participation;
- LEAs should be eligible to apply with state consent; and
- The competition should be open to all American territories.

The letter is available at nasbe.org/our-work/government-affairs/federal-updates.
Serve a minimum of 2500 participating students, individually or through a consortium;

- Have at least 40 percent of participating students from low-income families;
- Have a track record of commitment to core education assurance areas (college-and career-ready standards and assessments, robust sound data systems, teacher and leader effectiveness, and school turnaround);
- Design and commit to a system for evaluating teachers, principals, the LEA superintendent, and the LEA school board evaluation by 2014-2015;
- Implement a comprehensive data system that has an individual teacher identifier with a teacher-student match and the ability to match student level P-12 and higher education data;
- Have Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protections in place; and
- Submit an application with the signature of the LEA superintendent/CEO, local school board president, and local union/association president (where applicable).

LEAs must meet certain application requirements, including allowing five days for review and comment on the application by city and state leaders, and ensuring that consortia of districts have clear MOUs or other agreements that will govern the multidistrict award and management.

**Selection Criteria**

The Department’s proposed selection criteria are detailed below. The Department has not yet assigned points for each section, but will include them in the final application package in July.

**Vision:** The extent to which applicants present 1) a comprehensive and coherent vision for excellence and equity through personalized student and educator support, and (2) the extent to which this vision will translate into improved student performance as measured through such indicators as status and growth on summative assessments; decreases in achievement gaps; graduation rates; college enrollment rates; student attendance; and teacher attendance.

**District Capacity and Success Factors:** The extent to which applicants demonstrate a track record of success in:

- Increased transparency in district processes, practices, and investments including reporting of personnel salaries at the school level;
- Advancing excellence and equity as demonstrated by improved student outcomes and narrowed achievement gaps, ambitious and significant school turnaround models, and availability of student performance data;
- Meaningful stakeholder engagement and support, including a description of the involvement of families and staff in participating schools and letters of support from key stakeholders—including support from unions where applicable or from at least 70 percent of teachers in participating schools; and
- A high-quality plan for developing district capacity and supporting school-level implementation of the proposal.

**Preparing Students for College and Careers:** This element has four key sub-areas related to creating personalized learning environments, including:

- **Learning:** The quality of applicants’ plan to improve student learning;
- **Teaching:** The extent to which applicants’ approach to teaching empowers educators to improve instruction and increase effectiveness toward meeting college and career-ready outcomes;
- **Policy and Infrastructure:** The extent to which applicants have comprehensive policies, practices, and rules that enable personalized learning; and
- **Performance Management:** The extent to which applicants establish annual targets relating to the number and percentage of participating students (or educators), overall and by subgroup, who: a) have daily access to effective and highly effective educators; b) are on-track to college and career-readiness; c) were not on track at the beginning of the year but have caught-up by the end of the year; d) access their personalized learning plans weekly; e) graduate; f) complete a working conditions survey (for educators); and g) complete a student survey.

**Transition Plans and Continuous Improvement:** To support high-quality implementation and continuous improvement over time, applicants will also be evaluated on the extent to which they provide several plans, including an analysis of existing personalized learning, including needs and gaps, as well as a specific timeline, deliverables, risks, and plans to phase in implementation over time.

**Awards**

Applicants are permitted to apply for grants up to the following budget amounts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Budget Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2500-5000</td>
<td>$15-20 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001-9999</td>
<td>$17-22 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000+</td>
<td>$20-25 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information about the competition can be found on the Department’s website at [www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-district/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-district/index.html).