

**Frequently Asked Questions:
Completing the LEA Scope of Work for Race to the Top
Updated 10.15.10**

Logistics of Completing the LEA Scope of Work

- 1) To whom do I send my LEA's signed assurances and completed LEA Scope of Work?

The draft Scope of Work without the signed assurances should be submitted electronically by October 22, 2010 to Nina.Lennon@ride.ri.gov.

The completed Scope of Work and signed, original LEA assurances must be submitted in hard copy by November 12, 2010 to:

R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Department of Finance
255 Westminster St.
Providence, R.I. 02903-3400
Attention: Nina M. Lennon

- 2) How much detail should be included in the "adaptive challenges" sections?

The template allows you to continue to add information, and you should create a list that's meaningful and useful. If it's a bulleted list that includes information or if you want to write a narrative, that would also be OK. These will be public documents, so one-word answers are not acceptable. We want to understand things you are facing that you can't solve alone. Also, to the degree that you know what you need to meet challenges, include some information about that. Do you need technical assistance? Resources? Access to a platform?

- 3) Should we alter the template where it says "technical tasks"?

You can add to the technical challenges if you feel there is some additional task we should know about, but we don't need more detail than what is already there. Instead of us having you guess what we wanted, we identified the tasks and completion dates for you.

- 4) How should LEAs go about setting student-performance goals, and what criteria should help us determine our goals?

Begin with your existing numbers, which we've provided in the 2009 column. Start thinking about what trend line preceded that most recent data. Are you gaining momentum, or are you stuck right now? Also, try to unpack the data, especially around the gaps. Look at what is the profile of students with IEPs in your district. Do you have a preponderance of students with compounding disabilities? Are there differences between lower grades and upper grades? Bring as many people as you can to this thinking so it's owned by as many people as possible.

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- 5) What happens to the district goals and performance measures if your gap is minus or zero?

If you don't have a gap right now, our hope is that you maintain that zero and that gaps don't develop.

- 6) Is the 50% gap-closing requirement the final goal of the LEA or is the state goal the requirement?

The final state number is 50%, and that might mean different things in different districts. Some districts might have to do more than 50% gap closing. You want to get the overall proficiency rates up. Not only bring up the students in each group, but they will have to achieve more so the gap does not get wider. Think about the connection between goals.

- 7) What sources of student-achievement data will be acceptable for LEA goal-setting?

All goals in the Race to the Top application are based around NECAP, so all district goals must be based on NECAP. Districts can use other sources, however, to measure their progress toward meeting these NECAP goals. Ultimately, all federal and public reporting will relate to NECAP.

- 8) How did RIDE establish gap-closing goals for districts?

We looked at disaggregated data on the district NECAP report. We looked at gaps between various groups and white students. That is the gap we are hoping to close by 2014. We set goals at grades 4 and 8. We did not include targets for high-school students because 4 and 8 are benchmark grades. At grade 11, we shifted to the ultimate goal of graduation with readiness for college and success in postsecondary education. We're asking all districts to set targets for 2014, considering their starting points and where they think they can go.

- 9) There are no goals identified for English-language learners (ELLs) on the goals page (p. 13). Can we insert a row in that table and make goals for ourselves or must we stay with the groups that are identified?

Feel free to add a row and a goal for that group of students.

- 10) How did you calculate the number of students entering postsecondary education within two years of graduation (p. 12)?

Those numbers were derived from the National Student Clearinghouse; the numbers are for 2009, so they reflect graduates from the Class of 2007, giving them two years to complete one year of postsecondary study. The Clearinghouse provides data from 98% of all colleges. We have entered into a contract with the National Student Clearinghouse for data at the school level.

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- 11) Can an LEA adjust performance targets once they get new NECAP results, or any time in the future?

Of course. This will require constant conversation and reflection on what seems to be yielding the most positive outcomes. As we learn this, we might have to adjust goals. We can't adjust statewide numbers, but we have flexibility regarding individual district goals.

Overarching Questions about Race to the Top

- 12) How will our current practices (e.g. evaluation systems, interim assessments, data use) integrate with what is planned in Race to the Top? How do we know what of our current work will continue and what may change?

The opportunity in Race to the Top encourages all of us to build on the effective systems and practices within LEAs that advance student learning. Specifically, in the Scope of Work on page 14, we have asked districts to identify the initiatives and supports they already have in place that effectively advance student learning. This will help all of us to learn from one another. As we conduct a more deliberate gap analysis with LEAs in the early part of 2011, we will be able to assess what work can continue and what will need to be modified, changed, or improved. We will work together to make these decisions.

- 13) My LEA has systems in place that work well for us. What is the benefit to my LEA to being part of Race to the Top, and why isn't there more discretionary funding to build on what we're already doing?

We are asking districts to identify those systems and processes so we can learn from one another and figure out how to build on these systems. One of the benefits of being in Race to the Top is working together on common systems reaching across districts. This will help build a cohesive, unified state plan for reform. The Rhode Island Race to the Top application is a unified state application, not a district-by-district application. By combining our efforts, we can work together to benefit all of us.

We had hoped to apply for a greater amount of funding to have more money available to districts, but the U.S. Department of Education put a cap on funding based on the size of the state. We were unable to allocate greater discretionary funding to districts.

- 14) Our teachers' union did not sign on to our MOU. What are some suggestions on how to proceed with this work without the support of our teachers?

Whether unions signed or not does not indicate whether you have the support of your teachers. Communication is critical to engage teachers, unions, and community members. Your teachers' union is a critical partner in moving this grant forward. We can provide resources to help.

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- 15) We are concerned that RIDE is implementing Race to the Top concurrently with so many other initiatives. How will my LEA implement so many things at once?

The challenge is to have a plan for ensuring all students are prepared well. We have the strategic plan. Race to the Top is the funding opportunity to build and implement the strategies to accelerate student achievement. We will have to ensure our policies and strategies are aligned to move forward. We have asked districts to set their own goals and targets and to know the adaptive challenges we will face. This may be an adaptive challenge, and we will have to work together to be more aligned and cohesive in contributing to our goals.

- 16) Information sent from the Commissioner to my superintendent does not always get transferred to all team members at my district. What is RIDE doing to strengthen communications around Race to the Top?

Race to the Top is a huge communications challenge for everyone. We are creating a number of mechanisms to support this need: PowerPoint, the one-pager, the website, and these webinars. We have sought some outside assistance for a more robust communications plan, and we are seeking ideas from you. If you're not getting the information you need, we recommend that you talk with your superintendent. They want to communicate all of this to you. In the Scope of Work (SOW), we asked districts to point out engagement and communications strategies to ensure that all are informed about what we are doing. If you have some ideas as to how we can improve, please send them to us.

- 17) There's a reference in Race to the Top to urban and urban-ring schools. Who are the urban and urban-ring districts?

Central Falls, Cranston, East Providence, Johnston, Newport, North Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket.

Systems of Support

- 18) How will RIDE schedule professional development?

We will work with districts to schedule this together. For example, we will need to get at least 5,000 educators trained in the new Common Core standards by the end of 2012. We will work with districts to make sure the way we schedule these training sessions works for all districts. Some sessions could be planned on an already-scheduled professional development day. We will come up with a schedule makes the most sense for everyone.

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19) What data will be available in the instructional management system (IMS)?

We want to have several pieces of data in the IMS as soon as possible: item banks, interim assessments, formative-assessment models, and data related to state assessments, at minimum. We need to get that baseline IMS up and running, then prioritize our needs and wish lists and begin developing additional items to add.

We want to make sure teacher IDs, student IDs, and the district course-code data are accurate; we will have quality-control checks, but we will rely on districts to ensure that corrections are made.

20) How will local data be validated and made available as part of the IMS?

We will construct an interface through which districts can upload local data as they see fit; districts will be responsible for the accuracy of this data. This process will take a couple of years.

21) What will be the timeline for transition to the Common Core standards and the PARCC assessments?

We will transition fully to the Common Core in the 2013-14 school year. We will have study of standards sessions with teachers and with a transition team. We will begin meeting with principals in November 2010.

PARCC will be the new state testing program, which will have through-course assessment throughout the school year. This system will begin in 2014-15, and we will reach out in numerous ways to districts over the next few years regarding the transition to PARCC.

22) Must all districts fill out the section of the Scope of Work on persistently lowest-achieving schools?

Only districts with identified persistently lowest-achieving schools must fill out this section.

23) Can you explain the last goal on p. 11, which says that no student will have an ineffective teacher for two years in a row?

Our goal is that a student would never have an ineffective teacher. We can't guarantee that right now. We are basing this goal on research that says there is a significant loss of learning when a student has an ineffective teacher for two years in a row. If a teacher is given a rating of ineffective, whether to dismiss that teacher is a local decision. Statewide, however, after one year, support should be offered, but if the teacher is ineffective for a second year, the district must take action for dismissal.

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24) Why does the section on engineering and technology standards apply to Providence only?

That is a small project based on funding a formula; we had enough funding for one district to do a couple of exploratory problems. Providence got the biggest share of Race to the Top money so that initiative is available only to them. It is funded with the Providence contribution; there are no projects in which the state is making an investment limited to a particular district. Providence is paying for a specific project available only to Providence.

25) Regarding study of the standards (p. 21) how do you define teachers? Does the term include psychologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, all of our special educators, or only classroom teachers?

Every district has to wrestle with this. Districts need to think about who's delivering instruction and what they're responsible for.

26) Are all curriculum-development projects going on simultaneously?

No. It's mapped out over 4 years. We will phase in the start of curriculum work each year between now and 2014. We will send out guidance to map that out.

27) As to the evaluation tool that will be available to districts, what are the choices?

Most districts have signed up for the Rhode Island Model. Some districts (six) are working with the AFT Innovation Grant to develop an evaluation model. We hope the models will merge; districts will have small choices within the model, but overall the model will be the same for everyone.

28) Regarding the induction program – will we receive guidance on how this will work?

Yes, it will be another opportunity to work together to develop a model for a meaningful system. We will get information out in the next couple of months. The model will support all first-year teachers and, in urban districts, all first- and second-year teachers. Particulars of the model are unclear; we will develop the model in partnership with districts to shape the statewide model.

29) Regarding technical tasks for the instructional-management system and data platform – districts are asked to identify a data steward. What data would that person manage?

All of the data needed to respond to the performance measures you're committing to. We currently meet with all districts' data managers, but we don't want to assume this will be the same person tasked with managing data for Race to the Top. Districts can work with district liaisons on this issue if there are further questions.

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Budget and LEA Commitments

30) How will we continue to sustain the five systems of support in the grant after the four-year grant period?

We are encouraging efforts to bring districts together to achieve efficiencies and build capacity across districts. This process needs to continue to be a collaborative effort after the grant period. Everything in the grant is designed to be systems development and implementation that can all be accomplished during the 4-year period of the grant. There are no sustainable personnel positions from Race to the Top money; it's all contained within the 4-year period. Through adaptive questions in the Scope of Work (SOW), districts should identify what additional capacities they will need at the local level to implement these activities of the Race to the Top grant.

31) How do I distinguish what budget items are my LEA's contribution to statewide systems and what budget items are to be spent locally?

LEA cost estimates have been predetermined for most activities and are provided within the scope of work for each support system budget. The LEA Race to the Top allocations to be spent locally for each Support System are included in each budget table, as noted in the "Amount" column. Race to the Top funds will be set aside for estimated costs incurred during development of the Support Systems. This amount that the LEA has contributed for each Support System can be found in the narrative below the table. Please note that the estimated cost in the narrative is the sum for all districts in Race to the Top, not specific to each district. RIDE can provide each district with its specific contribution, upon request. Contact district liaisons for this information.

32) How and when will funds be distributed to LEAs?

Please refer to your budget guidance for further clarification. The reimbursement procedure will be consistent with other federal-grant reimbursement cash requests, similar to the SFSF reimbursement process.

33) How were the amounts that each LEA will receive calculated?

The Title I, Part A formula was used to determine the allocation of Race to the Top funds, and it will allow for some participating LEAs to receive more funds than the projected amounts needed to fully implement the Race to the Top plans. In addition, each Support System budget is broken into three parts: category, description, and detail. The detail breaks down the budget assumptions, explaining how the costs were estimated. Please refer to the budget guidance for further clarification.

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34) Will Race to the Top support the purchase of hardware, software, or infrastructure items?

Race to the Top does not support those items.

35) Can districts spend grant funds on central-office support staff for coordination of activities, such as teacher-leaders?

The Scope of Work contains a lot of cost estimates. There are a number of areas where we may have over- or underestimated costs. The amount allocated might be more than the actual cost to you. If that's the case, amounts allocated to districts can be reconfigured within the scope of work for that project, if the reallocation is approvable. As for purchasing general capacity beyond what is in the Scope of Work – e.g., hardware, central-office support: if it's not explicit in the Scope of Work, those are not going to be approvable expenditures.

36) Is the \$150 daily stipend for summer work a solid figure?

We developed cost estimates based on average costs. There's quite a range in actual costs, across the state, however. We will work with districts, but some districts have costs that are so far above the state average that we cannot allocate sufficient funds to those districts to meet the entire cost of the daily stipend. We will work with districts, however, to determine where we can be flexible.

37) What happens if Race to the Top money runs out in a district before the work is done?

The state together is building these five systems of support, as defined in the grant and on the Scope of Work documents. Every district will have access to all elements, regardless of their contribution. Collectively, we've built budgets so that we can build all of these systems. There is no system that any district could build based on its own allocation. It's not a question of a district's money running out. At the end of the day, every participating district is going to have equal access to all of the elements in the completed system.

38) If the money goes away and there's work in particular area that needs to be done, how do we accomplish that?

We have allocated money for professional development, for example, but there's no onus on a district to provide any professional development directly. The budgeted money is to provide access to teachers so that we can deliver professional development statewide. We have calculated this based on a statewide average.

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39) How would we document our need to use Race to the Top funds to get personnel on board (e.g., staff for central office)?

That is a very limited opportunity per district. If our estimates are too high on some other expenses for your district, you should highlight that, and you could use additional money to expand the scope in other areas. Each Scope of Work includes boxes for “adaptive challenges,” and we want to know where districts need additional capacity or resources to implement Race to the Top. We have interest from outside funders who could provide additional support. If there’s need, we can bring that information to outside funders, but we need to know where those gaps are.

40) Does the budget for evaluation and implementation (p. 35) apply only to urban and urban-ring districts?

Our original budget for evaluations focused on the urban districts. We are looking to see where we might have overestimated costs and whether we could redirect that money to provide support to suburban districts as well.

41) Do districts have the opportunity to move local appropriations from one category to another?

Generally, you can move 10% between support systems. We will get into more detail during the budget process, and will have guidance on budgets then as well.

42) If we did not commit to participate in an element of Race to the Top in our MOU, how is that represented in the final Scope of Work?

The budget section will be left blank. Every district SOW matches exactly what your commitments were in your MOU. If there is a mistake, get in touch with your liaison.

43) Can we change what we committed to in our MOU?

Technically, yes, but with great difficulty and with a lot of impact on other systems. Modifications to the MOU and to the SOW require approval from both RIDE and the U.S. Department of Education. Any changes you request, we will have to take under advisement, and it’s not an automatic change. Second, all budgeting is very tight, so any change on any district SOW is going to require a change to every district SOW because all of the money will need to be reallocated. Please confer with your district liaison if necessary.

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44) Can we change our commitments if we don't have capacity?

Be as clear as you can in the adaptive challenges sections. We are pursuing independent foundation money that will supplement our efforts, and shared needs across districts will help us to bring in outside funds. Don't assume there will not be additional resources; be as clear as you can in the adaptive challenges.

45) Are budget figures in the SOW final?

As final as we could make them at this point in time. We're very confident we're at a 95% accuracy rate, but we won't be able to finalize the numbers until all SOWs come in. We have a plan in place to work with every district to go through these budgets to make sure the budget numbers are sufficient. We did make some assumptions based on average costs, e.g. subs, stipends for PD. But there are some outliers, and we are not guaranteeing that Race to the Top funds will be sufficient. If you need to bring issues to our attention, we will do budgetary analyses after the SOW submissions on November 12.

46) Can a suburban district expand its allotted number of participants in RIDE PD if our district budget can support the expense?

That's something we can work out; if you have the money for PD and can use money for this, we would encourage that.