



Early Learning Challenge Collaborative

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge: Summary of Requirements, Priorities, and Selection Criteria

On August 23, 2011, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services released the final application – detailing requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions – for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. The full document is available at www.ed.gov. This summary is based on the ELCC's reading and interpretation of the federal application and is offered as a guide to help inform state teams' grasp of the requirements, criteria, and priorities as they continue planning and preparation.

Grant Size, Grant Period, and Application Timeline

The maximum amount each state may apply for is based on its relative population of low-income young children. The Departments can exercise discretion to ensure participation by states with high-poverty rural populations. The grant period is from December 31, 2011 to December 31, 2015.

Category 1	Up to \$100 million	CA, FL, NY, TX
Category 2	Up to \$70 million	AZ, GA, IL, MI, NC, OH, PA
Category 3	Up to \$60 million	AL, CO, IN, KY, LA, MO, NJ, OK, PR, SC, TN, VA, WA, WI
Category 4	Up to \$50 million	AK, AR, CT, DE, DC, HI, ID, IA, KS, ME, MD, MA, MN, MS, MT, NE, NH, NM, NV, ND, OR, RI, SD, UT, VT, WV, WY

Federal technical assistance to applicants will be provided via an “Introduction to the Application” webinar on September 1, 2011 and a planning workshop on September 13, 2011.

Applications are due October 19, 2011, and awards will be announced in December 2011.

Absolute, Competitive, and Invitational Priorities

Absolute priority—must be addressed in application; determined based on application as a whole.

- **Promoting school readiness for children with high needs**

States must build systems that increase the quality of early learning and development programs for children with high needs so they enter kindergarten prepared, by integrating and aligning resources and policies across participating State agencies and by designing and implementing a common, statewide tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).

Competitive preference priorities—applications can earn up to 10 extra points for addressing each of these issues.

- **Including all early learning and development programs in the QRIS**

States are encouraged to have all licensed or regulated programs participate in the QRIS and to extend licensing and inspection requirements to otherwise non-regulated programs.

- **Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry**

States are encouraged to implement kindergarten entry assessments that align with early learning and development standards; cover all essential domains of school readiness (language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development); and are valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population.

Invitational priorities—areas of interest that do not earn applicants extra points; winning states that address these issues may apply grant funds to this work.

- **Sustaining program effects in the early elementary grades**

States can work to align K-3 standards with early learning standards, ensure transition planning, promote health and family engagement, increase the percentage of children who are on grade-level in reading and math ability by third grade, and leverage existing Federal, State, and local resources.

- **Encouraging private sector support**

The departments are interested in states' private sector financial and in-kind support.

Selection Criteria

These are the focal points of the application—states will address them in their narratives, and they will form the basis for reviewers' evaluations. For each criterion, states are asked to demonstrate prior progress or articulate a plan for achievement. In Core Areas A and B, states must address all criteria; in Focused Investment Areas C, D, and E, states must address a minimum number of criteria, with an explanation for why those criteria were chosen. A total of 280 points may be earned in this section in addition to the 20 points available from the competitive priorities, for a total maximum score of 300 points.

A. Successful State Systems (65 points)

1. Demonstrate **past commitment to early learning and development** as evidenced by financial investments; participation trends of children with high needs in early learning and development programs; existing legislation, policies, or practices; and current statuses in key areas including standards, assessments, family engagement, workforce, and data practices. (20 points)
2. Articulate **the State's rationale for its reform agenda and goals** for improving program quality and child outcomes, with a clear path and consistent plan for achieving the state's goals and a specific rationale that justifies the State's choice to address selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area [see below]. (20 points)
3. **Align and coordinate early learning and development across the state** by identifying a governance structure and describing its approach to interagency coordination and integration, articulating roles and responsibilities, decision-making processes and broad stakeholder engagement, and statements of commitment and scopes of work. (10 points)
4. Develop a **budget** demonstrating how federal, state, local, and private resources (including CCDF quality dollars) will align with, supplement, support, and sustain the plan. (15 points)

B. High-Quality, Accountable Programs (75 points)

1. Develop and adopt a tiered **QRIS based on common tiered program standards** that include early learning standards, a comprehensive assessment system, educator qualifications, family engagement, health promotion, and effective data practices; are linked to state licensing; and measurably and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels and demonstrate high expectations. (10 points)
2. **Promote participation in the QRIS**, with goals of having all publicly-funded programs (including those funded by Title I, CCDF, state preschool, Head Start/Early Head Start, and IDEA Parts B/619 and C) participate at an increasing rate, implementing policies to help more families afford high-quality child care, maintaining the supply of high-quality programs to children with high needs, and setting targets for the numbers and percentages of programs that participate in the QRIS, by program type. (15 points)

3. **Rate and monitor programs** participating in the QRIS using valid tools, trained monitors, and sufficient frequency. Make ratings readily available and easy to understand. (15 points)
4. **Promote access to high-quality programs** for children with high needs with supports to programs to continuously improve (through training, technical assistance, financial rewards or incentives, etc.) and to working families (to meet their needs for timing, duration, transportation, meals, and family support services). Set targets for increasing the number of top tier programs and the number and percentage of children with high needs enrolled in them. (20 points)
5. **Validate the QRIS** by demonstrating that tiers are linked to differential levels of program quality and linking changes in ratings to progress for children’s learning outcomes, using an independent evaluator. (15 points)

For Focused Investment Areas C, D, and E, states must address at least 50% of each area, and they may choose to address all of the criteria. For Area C, states must select at least two of the four criteria. For Areas D and E, states must select at least one of the two criteria. The available points will be evenly divided by the number of criteria selected. The State must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

C. Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children (at least two criteria for 60 points)

1. Develop and use **statewide, high-quality early learning and development standards**—defined as a set of guidelines describing what children should know and be able to do—across programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate and cover domains of language and literacy, cognition, approaches to learning, physical, and social and emotional development. Incorporate standards into program standards, curricula, assessments, workforce competencies, and professional development, and align them with K-3 standards.
2. Support effective uses of **comprehensive assessment systems** that include screening measures, formative assessments, measures of environmental quality, and measures of adult-child interactions. Educate programs and train providers on purposes, uses, and interpretations of assessment systems.
3. Address **health, behavioral, and developmental needs** by establishing standards for screening and follow-up; promoting physical, social, and emotional development in program standards; and training and supporting providers to meet those standards. Increase the number of educators who are trained and supported in meeting health standards. Promote ongoing health care, improved nutrition, and physical activity.
4. **Engage and support families** by including family engagement in program standards, training providers in family engagement strategies, and leveraging home visiting programs and other existing resources to promote family support.

D. A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce (at least one criterion for 40 points)

1. Develop a **common, statewide workforce knowledge and competency framework** (expectations for what educators should know and be able to do) that promotes learning and improved child outcomes; develops a common, statewide progression of credentials and degrees; and engages postsecondary institutions and professional development providers to provide aligned opportunities.
2. Support educators in improving their **knowledge, skills, and abilities** by providing professional development opportunities and implementing policies and incentives that promote professional improvement and career advancement. Publicly report aggregated data on educator development, advancement, and retention; and set targets for increasing alignment with postsecondary institutions and professional development providers and increasing the number and percentage of educators who progress to higher level credentials.

E. Measuring Outcomes and Progress (at least one criterion for 40 points)

1. Administer a common, statewide **kindergarten entry assessment** that is aligned with early learning standards; covers all essential domains of school readiness; is valid, reliable, and appropriate for all children; is reported to statewide data systems; is implemented by the 2014-15 school year, potentially through a phased implementation plan; and is funded, in significant part, with federal or state resources other than those available under this grant.
2. Build or enhance **an early learning data system** that has all of the essential data elements (unique child identifier or other accurate method to link data on child, a unique statewide educator identifier, child and family demographic information, educator demographic information, program-level data, and child-level program participation and attendance data), enables uniform data collection and exchange, and generates timely, relevant, and accessible information for programs and educators.

Select Program Requirements

- To be eligible to apply, states must have an operational State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care.
- States must continue to participate in CCDF; Part B and Part C of IDEA; in the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (including having submitted an updated FY 2010 state plan and FY 2011 application for formula funding).
- They must set aside at least \$400,000 from grant funds for technical assistance activities, participate in any technical assistance activities facilitated by ED or HHS, participate in any evaluation that ED or HHS chooses to fund, provide researchers with access to data, and make their work available to the public.
- States must have their longitudinal data system in place as per their agreement with ED, and they must comply with privacy laws.
- Funds must be used to supplement, not supplant, any federal, state, or local early learning funds. States cannot spend grant funds on the direct provision of health services.

Signatories and Assurances

- The Governor must sign the application, and the Attorney General must certify that it complies with state laws.
- State agencies required to participate in developing the plan and sign the application include those that administer or supervise child care subsidies, IDEA early intervention, state preschool, home visiting, Title I, Head Start collaboration, the state early learning council, maternal and child health, child care licensing, and the State Education Agency. For each of those entities, the Lead Agency (one of the agencies mentioned above designated by the Governor as the fiscal agent) must attach a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) describing their level of participation in the grant and assuring the agencies will execute the policies and practices in the plan.