

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Race to the Top Support to States

October 30, 2009

Recognizing that winners in the U.S. Department of Education's \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) program will emerge with clearer strategies and greater financial backing to realize their reform goals, we saw an opportunity to help accelerate states' education reform agendas and to advance our College Ready Strategy. Through two initiatives, we have linked management consulting firms and technical assistance providers with states to support development of their RTTT proposals. In both initiatives, we selected a project manager to serve as the primary point of contact for the consultants.

1. RTTT technical assistance to a pre-selected pool of 15 states

Prior to the announcement of RTTT, we had already selected 15 states that have demonstrated commitment to the components of the Foundation's College Ready strategy and that may be poised to pilot and scale promising reforms that enhance student achievement. Starting in the summer of 2009, we matched consulting firms with these states, and this initiative's project manager, Arabella Advisors, continues to provide resources and support. The foundation vetted the consulting firms with a focus on experience, capacity and commitment to a college readiness agenda.

States: Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas.

Consultants: Alvarez & Marsel, The Boston Consulting Group, Booz & Allan, The Bridgespan Group, The Education First Group, The McKinsey Group, and The Parthenon Group.

Criteria: The states were selected as part of an extensive due diligence effort prior to RTTT.

Support: Our support is restricted to compensating consulting firms up to \$250,000 for technical assistance to each state, as well as providing project management services and resources to the firms, including expert calls, background materials, and updates on RTTT developments. We continue to talk with the states and to learn about their RTTT work through our diligence efforts and grant-making activities, but we do not participate in the planning meetings and application development they are doing with firms.

2. RTTT technical assistance to the remaining 35 states that are eligible

Pending grant approval, we will make a grant to the New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3) managed by Arabella Advisors, to provide the remaining 35 states with an opportunity to receive consultant support for the RTTT application process. This second initiative is wholly independent of the first and will not involve any support beyond the contract for consulting assistance. The New Venture Fund will review applications from the states and their consulting partners, conduct basic due diligence on firms, and then negotiate and execute the contracts with the firms.

States: Any state that meet the following criteria and do not receive RTTT support as part of the pool of 15 states.

Criteria: In addition to requiring a clear and satisfactory scope of work for the consulting firm's technical assistance, we will evaluate states according to the following criteria:

1. Has the state signed the MOA regarding the Common Core Standards currently being developed by NGA/CCSSO? [Answer must be “yes”]
2. Does the state plan to adopt the common core standards by June 2010 (as currently referenced in the draft RTT guidance)? [Answer must be “yes”]
3. Demonstrate how the state plans to adopt/prioritize the common core standards currently being developed by NGA/CCSSO? [Answers will be scrutinized to assess commitment and viability]
4. Does the state offer an alternative route(s) to teacher certification? [Answer must be “yes”]
5. Does the state grant teacher tenure in fewer than three years? [Answer must be “no” or the state should be able to demonstrate a plan to set a higher bar for tenure]
6. Does the state have policies or grant programs (e.g., TIF grant) in place that encourage the placement of the most effective teachers in schools with most disadvantaged kids (e.g. to campuses undergoing state/fed accountability intervention) [Answer must be “yes” or state must demonstrate commitment and/or plans to put policies in place]
7. Does the state have at least six of the DQC’s 10 essential data elements? (Required six: unique student identifiers, teacher-student link, student level enrollment data, graduation and dropout data.)
8. Does the state have policies that prohibit the linkage and/or usage of student achievement data in teacher evaluations?

Support: Qualifying states will have access to up to \$250,000 for management consulting services that support their RTTT proposal development. Unlike in the first initiative, however, these states will be responsible for finding their own consulting firms. While the project manager will facilitate the due diligence and selection process, there will be no ongoing project support