

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Higher Education Q & A

General Questions

1. Can two or more entities within a single university apply for different projects?
 - a. Yes, but the entities must assure that all work will be kept separate.
2. How will projects be sustained after the grant?
 - a. A tentative sustainability plan has been developed for each project within in the grant application.
3. Is there a page limit for the narrative?
 - a. No, but the more concise, the better.
4. Can we include an appendix (i.e. CVs?) and if so, do you have a page limit?
 - a. Yes, no limit.
5. Will you allow indirect funds (or F&A) and if so, do you have a rate limit?
 - a. Yes, we do allow indirect funds. There is no limit; however, we will review the rate for reasonableness.
6. Do you allow letters of endorsement (for example, from agencies and school districts that we have collaborated with in the past). This is separate from the MOUs we are collecting from the community college partners.
 - a. Yes, but not required.
7. Are faculty allowed to use data collected and/or are their ways that faculty could publish on their work on any of the 4 initiatives?
 - a. Yes, but the data are the property of the DOE and authorship guidelines must be followed.
8. For the four paper versions of the application - can it be postmarked on May 30th or do they have to be at the DOE on that day? **(NEW)**
 - a. While the electronic copy must be sent by May 30th, the paper copies can be postmarked May 30th.

Training Academy Questions

1. Can a community college be the Training Academy lead?
 - a. No, although a waiver process exists to provide contracts directly to community colleges, we will not be able to complete such a process in the timeframe outlined in the RTT-ELC grant.

2. Who will be receiving the trainings provided through the Training Academy?
 - a. Trainings will primarily be directed to Quality Improvement Specialists (QIS's). The QIS's are comprised of Head Start education specialists, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and coaches within the former Abbott districts, among others. The QIS's will support the programs that are participating in Grow NJ Kids. In the subsequent years, the Training Academy will provide direct professional development across early childhood systems and programs (including, but not limited to Home Visiting staff, Special Education staff, principals, directors and teachers in early childhood programs across settings).

3. Can we establish partnerships with Head Start and Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies?
 - a. Head Start and Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies cannot be a partner in these trainings, as they are two of the entities intended to receive trainings.

4. Is there a requirement for 4-year colleges/universities to collaborate with a community college as well?
 - a. Yes, we **require** partnerships between state colleges/universities and community colleges for the Training Academy.

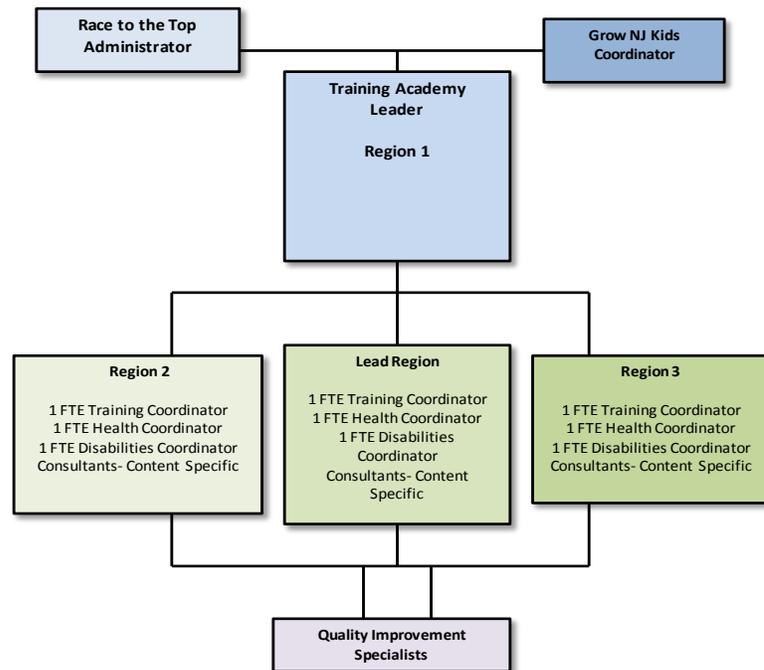
5. Can a college/university subcontract with community colleges to deliver trainings?
 - a. Yes, we **require** partnerships between state colleges/universities and community colleges. These partnerships should be described within the application. Keep in mind that no more than 49% of the total budget of an MOU may be dedicated to subcontracts.

6. Will the Training Academy lead track all of the participation?
 - a. Both the Workforce Registry and Training Lead will capture participation within the Training Academy.

7. How are the regions defined?
 - a. The three regions have not specifically been defined, however we do require for there to be north, central and south regions. Each region must be comprised of multiple adjacent counties, with the goal of maximizing accessibility to trainings for potential trainees in all communities throughout the state.

8. What is the structure of the Training Academy?

- a. The Training Academy will consist of at least 3 regions, each equipped with a cadre of trainers from state colleges, state universities, and community colleges. One state college/university will serve as the “Lead”, employing a “Training Academy Leader”, who will ensure consistency and reliability among the three regions. The Lead entity will also oversee one of the three regions (the “Lead Region”). The Lead/Training Academy Leader/Lead Region will then work with the state colleges/universities overseeing each of the other two regions. See diagram below.



9. Is a 4-year university expected to apply to operate the three regional academies or can/must they apply to operate one region and work with the universities heading the other two regions?

- a. As the lead, a 4-year university will coordinate the work in other regions and not necessarily do the work. This is where the collaboration with other entities becomes important (e.g., community college). The lead could also do the work in one region, (e.g., the southern region), while coordinating the other regions.

10. Is the job of the lead academy to make sure trainers are trained in the components of Grow NJ Kids or will the lead be developing the training modules?

- a. The training is designed to support the components of Grow NJ Kids. For instance, there will be curriculum trainers, trainers in the Pyramid model, training in the screening and assessment, and so on. The training materials will largely come from the publishers of the materials through the train-the-trainer model. There may be some training modules that will need to be developed to support implementation of Grow NJ Kids.

11. Is there any room for additional professional development, designed (for example) by faculty members with different expertise?
 - a. Additional professional development can be added as needed.
12. Is it the job of the Academy (and the partner community college) to reach out and recruit training participants or is there going to be a list provided by the state?
 - a. There will be list of participants provided by the state.
13. How much should the lead set aside for the train-the-trainer series?
 - a. We estimate that the train-the-trainers training would cost approximately \$178,000 for the first year and \$90,000 for second year. As described in the application (on page 8), the lead will coordinate the training for all regions.
14. Can community colleges be considered regional leads?
 - a. Yes, DOE would award one large MOU to a university and the university would then subcontract a total of no more than 49% of the budget to the community colleges.
15. On page nine of the application guidelines, under Staffing, two key regional staff members (early childhood health and disabilities) are listed as consultants. On question #8 in the most recent Higher Education Q&A, these same staff members are listed as Health Coordinators and Disabilities Coordinators. What is the correct title?
 - a. As they will have a coordinating function, the appropriate title is Coordinator.
16. Page eight of the application guidelines, under Funds, indicates that approximately \$7.1M in grants funds are allocated to the Training Academy, and annual grant funds are estimated to be in the categories of Lead Region, Region 2, and Region 3 personnel, as well as in Lead Region Training expenses. Are these the only expense categories where funding will be allocated or are there other allowable costs that can be requested (i.e., travel)? If there are other allowable costs, including indirect costs (F&A), must applicants keep their budgets within the annual funding allocations, thereby reducing some of the personnel expenditures?
 - a. You can add expenditure categories like travel and indirect costs, and can allocate different amounts each year, but the total amount allocated must remain at or below \$7.1m.
17. Do a Lead Institution's partners need to agree upon a reasonable rate or would it be the Lead Institution's sole responsibility to determine a reasonable rate? In addition, can a request for indirect funding take the overall funding over and above the \$7.1 Training Academy allocation, or will we need to reduce costs elsewhere if we request indirect funding?
 - a. Multiple rates are allowable, but all will be reviewed for reasonableness. Total funding, including indirect, cannot exceed \$7.1 million.
18. What does the funding category of Lead Region Training specifically entail?

- a. It's the funding that the Lead Region should budget to arrange for all necessary train-the-trainers training.
19. Is there a cost sharing/matching funds requirement for the lead institution and/or its partners?
- a. No
20. A community college we contacted asked about whether the collaboration with the Training Academy "belonged" in the "credit" bearing portion of their community college, or in the "continuing education" division. Does DOE have any guidance about this issue?
- a. While we want to ensure that the training is purposeful to participants who will access training to move up the career lattice, there is no requirement for training to be credit bearing. As such, it is up to the discretion of the colleges to determine whether credits can be given.
21. Can dollars be used for support staff and materials (e.g., computers)?
- a. Yes
22. Are applicants for a regional academy limited in requesting total funding at a certain level, or can a well-developed budget and narrative be submitted, with the final award negotiated between the applicant university and the NJDOE? **(NEW)**
- a. Costs can be negotiated by the region, but will stay within the total funding allocated for the project.

Ratings Questions

No questions have been posed at this time.

Validation Questions

1. On page 17 of the RFP, it mentions that "Annual reports will provide information regarding patterns in the type and characteristics of sites..." Will these reports be provided by the state (and if so, in what form?) or is the evaluation team expected to create these annual reports?
 - a. The evaluation team is expected to create the annual reports. However, DOE will work with the IHE to determine the elements of the report.
2. On page 16 the RFP, under Requirements for a successful validation, #4 talks about longitudinal data. Do you expect the evaluators to follow children longitudinally throughout the multi-year project? In other words, is this intended to be a longitudinal study or a cross-sectional study of a new cohort each year?
 - a. Yes, we plan to track the children longitudinally.
3. On page 16 the RFP, under Requirements for a successful validation, #4 also talks about using data from NJ SMART. Can you clarify how data from NJ SMART may fit into this study?
 - a. We want to know, for example, if children from higher rated sites, perform better on measures of performance (e.g. Kindergarten Entry Assessment) when they enter school. This data will eventually be stored in NJ SMART.

4. Does quality here refer to classroom level quality (ECERS-R, CLASS, etc.) or program quality (1 to 5) as assigned by Grow NJ Kids? Will program rating information be provided?
 - a. It refers to both. We are trying to validate the program's rating so you will need that information. It is expected that you will conduct classroom observations as part of the validation process.
5. Are the Quality Levels (1 TO 5) that are assigned by Grow NJ Kids at the site level?
 - a. Yes
6. Can we reduce the number of classrooms from the 576 classrooms included in the application?
 - a. Yes
7. Should infant/toddler and preschool programs be sampled evenly?
 - a. Each type of room will be sampled proportionate to the number they represent for that site.
8. Do you have a sense of the number of prek/infant and toddler programs that exist in the Grow NJ Kids system?
 - a. Once participants enroll in Grow NJ Kids, we will be able to provide that information.
9. Is Grow NJ Kids mandatory?
 - a. No, it is not mandatory; it is voluntary.
10. Is a longitudinal study desired or separate cohorts of prek/infant and toddler children for each year?
 - a. While we would like to have a longitudinal study to see how children from high quality sites perform over time, we would like an IHE to propose an approach.
11. Is the same technical assistance provided to each site and classroom? What does the technical assistance consist of?
 - a. No. The technical assistance will be provided based on the needs of the program. Quality Improvement Specialists (QIS) will train with modules developed by the Training Academy when providing local training to participating programs including, but not limited to training on curriculum, standards, and structured observation instruments.
12. Is technical assistance the same at the same within a site or can different classrooms receive different technical assistance within the same program?
 - a. In general, technical assistance will be provided at the site level (e.g. all staff will participate in the same curriculum training). However, the in-class support may vary by results of the structured observation instrument conducted by the Director/Principal.

Preschool to Third Grade Initiative

1. Once modules are developed, who will own them?
 - a. All modules developed through the grant will be considered state-owned, and will be made available statewide.
2. Are there requirements as to who would constitute an expert?
 - a. We expect that the expert review will consist of people who have experience in the PreK-3rd grade field and represent a broad range of content areas with a focus on early elementary grades. The guidelines will promote practices that are both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate. We expect the reviewers to have knowledge of how to balance these concepts.
3. How many experts do you expect to be part of the expert review?
 - a. No requirement
4. What are the expectations for the expert review?
 - a. The agency will work with the DOE to develop review questions. Once the MOU is awarded, the DOE will arrange a meeting with the agency to further define the review process.
5. How much money did you expect the expert review to cost?
 - a. The guidelines will be a fairly extensive document, covering many areas, and may take several days to review. We estimate that the cost could range for \$3,500 to \$5,000.
6. Do you have a particular percentage of schools you would like to see pilot/field tested?
 - a. There is no requirement on the percentage of schools. However, we do expect representation from grades 1-3 as well as representation from various regions throughout the state (i.e., north, central, and south).
7. Could you give us more details regarding what you expect for the field test of the guidelines?
 - a. We are looking for a systematic approach to measuring the implementation and usability of the guidelines. We anticipate that this will at least involve teacher and administrator interviews and focus groups.
8. Are we able to move money from one category to the other?
 - a. Yes, but DOE approval will be required. Furthermore, it is permissible to reallocate dollars in the budget to accommodate training needs. For instance, proposals may include larger cohorts or fewer participants. In addition, plans to seek additional funding from foundations are permissible to include in the application.
9. Is there a group leader for the Guidelines Steering Committee?
 - a. Yes, Liz Vaughan from the DOE.

10. Would the Guidelines Steering Committee be more of an advisory group to us or would they be actively involved in writing the actual guidelines with us?
 - a. During the writing phase, Liz Vaughan will work closely with the university to review content. During the field test, we will utilize the steering committee to review implementation of the guidelines.

11. How many days of training should be allocated?
 - a. Six days per year per cohort for two years, which breaks down to include the following: 6 days total in year 2, 12 days total in year 3, and 6 days total in year 4.

12. Does all of this training need to be in person?
 - a. We're open to mixed-delivery of training (e.g., online & in person).

13. What is the cost breakdown of the project?
 - a. The \$43,750 is for Year 1 costs. We talk about it in terms of 2 separate projects – one to create the guidelines, and one to train on them. The total cost of the project is \$493,750. We've dedicated \$43,750 for the creation of the guidelines, and then another \$450,000 for module development and training on the guidelines in Years 2-4.