



**RACE TO THE TOP-EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE:
 TEMPLATE FOR STATE PREPARATION
 August 2011**

The U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS) have released the final application and executive summary for the \$500 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (available on-line at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>).

This template is designed to help states prepare for and structure their application process by assembling key information about their current status and future plans, the major elements of their responses to each application criterion, and the evidence or data that supports their application. With this information, the template provides an opportunity for states to articulate ideas for what the state should do in order to meet the grant criteria, including specific next steps. The template is modeled on and crosswalked with the final application, although it is not as detailed.

The application defines the criteria that states will be graded on, and notes several priority areas that states must or should address. The Absolute Priority must be addressed, the two Competitive Priorities can add up to 20 points out of a total possible 300, and the two Invitational Priorities are areas in which the Departments are interested but will not be awarded extra points. The priorities for the RTTT-ELC grant program are as follows:

Absolute Priority	Competitive Priorities	Invitational Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (10 points) Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry (10 points) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustaining Program Effects in the Early Elementary Grades Encouraging Private Sector Support

The Departments also have organized the selection criteria into two core areas and three focused investment areas. In each of these areas, there are two to five selection criteria in the application; these elements are included in this template. The two core areas, in which states **must address all selection criteria**, are (A) Successful state systems and (B) High-quality, accountable programs. The three focused investment areas, in which states **must address at least 50% or more of the selection criteria**, are (C) Promoting early learning and development outcomes for children; (D) A great early childhood workforce; and (E) Measuring outcomes and progress. Over the course of responding to the criteria, states must address the absolute priority, and may wish to address the competitive and invitational priorities as well. The executive summary also includes definitions (p. 21) that states may want to refer to in preparing their answers. Where defined terms are used in this template, they are shown in SMALL CAPS.

The following chart illustrates the possible 300 points states can receive in each of these areas and their corresponding selection criteria:

A. SUCCESSFUL STATE SYSTEMS [65 POINTS (22% of the total points available)]	
Selection Criteria	Associated points
(A)(1) Demonstrating past commitment to early learning and development	20
(A)(2) Articulating the State's rationale for its early learning and development reform agenda and goals	20
(A)(3) Aligning and coordinating early learning and development across the State	10
(A)(4) Developing a budget to implement and sustain the work of this grant	15
B. HIGH-QUALITY, ACCOUNTABLE PROGRAMS [75 POINTS (25%)]	
Selection Criteria	Associated points
(B)(1) Developing and adopting a common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10
(B)(2) Promoting participation in the State's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15
(B)(3) Rating and monitoring Early Learning and Development Programs	15
(B)(4) Promoting access to high-quality Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs	20
(B)(5) Validating the effectiveness of the State Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	15
C. PROMOTING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN [60 POINTS (20%)]	
Selection Criteria	Associated points
(C)(1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards	State must address at least two selection criteria. Total points are divided evenly among the criteria selected.
(C)(2) Supporting effective uses of a Comprehensive Assessment System	
(C)(3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness	
(C)(4) Engaging and supporting families	
D. A GREAT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE [40 POINTS (13%)]	
Selection Criteria	Associated points
(D)(1) Developing a Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework and a progression of credentials	State must address at least one selection criteria. Total points are divided evenly among the criteria selected.
(D)(2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities	
E. MEASURING OUTCOMES AND PROGRESS [40 POINTS (13%)]	
Selection Criteria	Associated points
(E)(1) Understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry	State must address at least one selection criteria. Total points are divided evenly among the criteria selected.
(E)(2) Building or enhancing an early learning data system to improve instruction, practices, services, and policies	
COMPETITIVE PRIORITIES [20 POINTS (7%)]	
Selection Criteria	Associated points
Including all Early Learning and Development Programs in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System	10
Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten Entry	10

The information needed to populate this template will come from many sources. The state's application for HHS State Advisory Council funds will likely have much of it. Other sources will include state plans and other materials from the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and other annual or strategic reports produced by leading early childhood agencies. The template is provided in Word format so that states can use it to complete their answers.

The process of completing this template should be led by the state's point person for the RTT-ELC grant. In many states, the work will be managed by a leadership team representative of the key agencies and stakeholders expected to spearhead the work of the grant. States should be as honest as possible about their strengths and weaknesses, and do what they can in the coming weeks and months to formulate plans that build on their strengths and address their weaknesses.

Self-Evaluating Current Status

In completing the "current status" column, states may want to self-evaluate by classifying their status:

1. The state has not addressed this element.
2. The state is in the planning stages on this element.
3. The state has begun implementation of this element.
4. The state is implementing this element and has evidence of progress.
5. The state meets the expectations of the grant criteria.

The purpose of self-evaluating with a rating like this is to inform discussion, and states should not spend significant time debating what the proper rating is. Instead, it should be used to identify areas that need the most significant policy change, and also to identify areas in which stakeholders have differing opinions of the state's current status. A column titled "CS #" has been included in the template, where states can fill in whichever number they believe corresponds best to their existing status.

TEMPLATE FOR STATE RTT-ELC PREPARATION

(A) SUCCESSFUL STATE SYSTEMS [65 points]					
Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(A)(1) The State's Past Commitment to Early Learning and Development (p. 26 in the Application)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the state invested in EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS since 2007? • What are its key programs? How was this investment affected by or protected from state budget cuts? • How does state policy and practice show its commitment to early learning? • What percentage of CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS in the state is served by the state's programs? • How has the state worked to increase access for CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS in recent years? • What is the state's status in key policy areas including EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS, COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS, workforce development, data, health promotion, and family engagement? <p><i>Note: For this criterion, the application includes numerous charts that request empirical information. States should consider completing these charts first to inform their narrative answers.</i></p>	20				

(A) SUCCESSFUL STATE SYSTEMS [65 points]

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(A)(2) The State's Rationale for its Early Learning and Development Reform Agenda and Goals (p. 39)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the state have a clear goal or mission statement? • Does the state have specific plans for achieving its goals regarding improving program quality and outcomes for CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS, and closing the readiness gap? • Does the state have a rationale that justifies its choice to addresses all or some of the selected criteria in each Focused Investment Area (C), (D), and (E) and why the selected criteria will best achieve its goals? • Is the state clear about its definition of early learning programs and how that relates to the federal definition of EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (p. 22)? • Has the state established specific goals and targets for increasing participation in EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, and improving performance on any kindergarten entry assessments? • How does the effective reform agenda incorporate key building blocks such as standards, assessments, and tiered quality rating? • How does the state's early learning agenda connect to its K-12 agenda, and how does the K-12 agenda connect to early learning? • How has the private sector been engaged in developing the agenda? 	20				

(A) SUCCESSFUL STATE SYSTEMS [65 points]

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(A)(3) Aligning and Coordinating Early Learning and Development across the State (p. 41)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the state's governance structure for EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS? • How will the state define the role of PARTICIPATING STATE AGENCIES in the work, and what agencies need to be included? • What collaborative advisory bodies has the state formed for its early learning system, including its state advisory council? How effectively have those bodies functioned? How will they function going forward? • How will local early learning providers and networks, local education agencies, and technical assistance/professional development providers be involved in the grant, and what will their commitment be? • What other entities will be involved in the grant (such as school boards, business leaders, health organizations, etc.), and what specific actions have they committed to in order to ensure its success? • How ready is your state's early learning leadership to successfully collaborate and implement change effectively? • Is the state addressing the Invitational Priorities articulated by the Departments – sustaining outcomes through the early elementary years, and encouraging private sector support? 	<p>10</p>				

(A) SUCCESSFUL STATE SYSTEMS [65 points]

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(A)(4) Developing a Budget for the Grant (p. 44)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the state identified ways in which existing state and federal funding streams will be used to support its goals?• How can the state most effectively use grant funds to support its goals in the Challenge?• Has the state identified local and philanthropic resources that can be used to help achieve its goals?• What is the state's plan for using one-time funds effectively and then sustaining the work beyond the grant period?	15				

(B) HIGH-QUALITY, ACCOUNTABLE PROGRAMS [75 points]

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(B)(1) Developing and Adopting Tiered Program Standards (p. 46)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the state adopted a TIERED QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM based on common PROGRAM STANDARDS, linked to the state's licensing system? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If not, what plans does the state have to do so? • Do the Program Standards include EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS, a COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR qualifications, family engagement strategies, health promotion practices, and effective data practices? • Has the state ensured that the PROGRAM STANDARDS are clear and measurable and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels? 	10				

(B) HIGH-QUALITY, ACCOUNTABLE PROGRAMS [75 points]

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(B)(2) Promoting Participation in Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (p. 48)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the system set goals and identified targets for program participation? • How does the state anticipate the participation of the following EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: State-funded preschool programs; Early Head Start and Head Start programs; Early Learning and Development Programs funded under section 619 of part B of IDEA and part C of IDEA; Early Learning and Development Programs funded under Title I of the ESEA; and programs receiving funder under CCDF? • What policies and practices will the state implement to help families afford high-quality child care and maintain the supply of high-quality child care in areas with high concentrations of CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS? • How does the state promote program participation in the system? • How is information about the system conveyed to EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS? • Is the state addressing the Competitive Priority to include all EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS in the TIERED QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM? 	15				
<p>(B)(3) Rating and Monitoring Programs (p. 50)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the state validly and reliably rate and monitor programs in the TIERED QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM? • How is information about the system conveyed to parents and the public? 	15				

(B) HIGH-QUALITY, ACCOUNTABLE PROGRAMS [75 points]

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	PTS.	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(B)(4) Promoting Access to High-Quality Programs for CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS (p. 51)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What supports does the state provide through the TIERED QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM to help programs meet higher standards and continuously improve (i.e. technical assistance, training, various methods of financial support)? • What supports does the state provide to working families with CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS (i.e. transportation, meals, reimbursement rates, full-day/full-year programs)? • Has the state set targets for the number of programs in the top tiers of the TIERED QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM and for the number and percentage of CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS enrolled in top-tier programs? 	20				
<p>(B)(5) Validating the Effectiveness of the System (p. 55)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the tiered system validated to show that the different levels accurately reflect differential levels of quality? • How is the tiered system validated to show that changes in quality ratings are related to children’s progress in learning? • How is the TIERED QUALITY RATING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM designed to sustain program effects into the early elementary grades? 	15				

(C) PROMOTING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN [60 points]

The state must address two or more of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(C)(1) Developing and Using High-Quality Early Learning and Development Standards (p. 56)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the state developed EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS that are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate across all ESSENTIAL DOMAINS OF SCHOOL READINESS – and that address children from birth through kindergarten entry? Which domains are addressed?• Are the EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS aligned to the state's K-12 standards, at least for literacy and math?• In which EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS are the EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS used?• How are the EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS used and implemented? Are they incorporated in curricula, assessment, and workforce policies?• How does the state ensure that the EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS are understood and used at the provider level for EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?				

(C) PROMOTING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN [60 points]

The state must address two or more of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(C)(2) Supporting the Effective Use of Assessment (p. 57)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the state use statewide early learning assessments? If so, does it have a COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If so, what assessments and how are they used?○ If not, does it have plans to develop them?• In which EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS are assessments currently used?• What is the state's approach for incorporating and aligning a COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM across EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?• How does the state train EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS and EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS in the administration, use, and quality improvement value of assessments?• Does the state's use of assessment align with the recommendation of the National Research Council?• Is the state addressing the Competitive Priority regarding understanding the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry?				

(C) PROMOTING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN [60 points]

The state must address two or more of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(C)(3) Identifying health, behavioral, and developmental needs (p. 58)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the state identify and address the health, behavioral, and developmental needs of HIGH-NEED CHILDREN?• Does the state have a progression of standards for ensuring child health and safety, and promoting their development?• How does the state ensure that children are screened, and that the screening leads to follow-up services? How does the state leverage community resources?• How does the state promote healthy eating, nutrition, and physical activity?				
<p>(C)(4) Engaging and Supporting Families (p. 61)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How has the state incorporated family engagement in its program requirements for all EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?• How has the state prepared EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS to work successfully with families? Has the state set targets for increasing the number of educators who are well-prepared?• How has the state leveraged resources to promote family support and engagement, including through home visiting and other family service programs?				

(D) A GREAT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE [40 points]

The state must address at least one of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(D)(1) Workforce Knowledge and Competencies Framework (p. 64)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the state have a WORKFORCE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK, and a progression of degrees or credentials aligned with the competencies?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If not, does the state have plans to develop such competencies?• How does the state work with higher education providers to ensure their programs are aligned to the WORKFORCE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES?				

(D) A GREAT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE [40 points]

The state must address at least one of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(D)(2) Implementing the Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework (p. 65)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the state support improved effectiveness and retention for EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS through professional development? • What policies and incentives are in place (i.e. scholarships, compensation/wage supplements, tiered reimbursement rates, financial incentives, management opportunities) to promote professional improvement and career advancement, and to increase retention on a career pathway that is aligned with the WORKFORCE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK? • How does the state share information about EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR development, advancement, and retention with the public? • How does the state set targets for increasing the number of higher education providers with programs aligned to the WORKFORCE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK, and for increasing the credentialing level of the workforce? 				

(E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress [40 points]

The state must address at least one of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(E)(1) Understanding Children’s Status at Kindergarten Entry (p. 68)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Does the state have or plan to have a common statewide kindergarten entry assessment that is administered to all children entering kindergarten statewide? If so, what are the assessment's characteristics? Does it address all of the ESSENTIAL DOMAINS OF SCHOOL READINESS? How is it validated, to whom is it administered, and how are results reported? Is it appropriate for all children, including English learners and children with disabilities? Are the results included in the state's longitudinal data system? For what purposes does the state use the assessment?○ If not, does the state have plans to develop such an assessment? For what purposes does the state plan to use the assessment? How will the state administer the assessment no later than the start of the 2014-2015 school year? Will it propose a phased implementation plan?● How will the state use Federal and State resources beyond those available under this grant as significant sources to fund this assessment?● How does the assessment relate to the COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM?				

(E) Measuring Outcomes and Progress [40 points]

The state must address at least one of the selection criteria. Total points will be evenly divided by the number of selection criteria that the state selects. The state must provide a rationale for why it chose to address the selected criteria.

Criteria/Policy Area and Questions	Current Status	CS #	Major Ideas or Elements of Response	Supporting Evidence and Data
<p>(E)(2) Building or Enhancing an Early Learning Data System (p. 69)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the state begun implementing a unified early childhood data system that works across funding streams to link information about uniquely identified children, personnel, and providers – including all of the ESSENTIAL DATA ELEMENTS?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If so, what elements does it have in place?○ If not, has it begun planning or design work on such a system?• Has the state identified key information that the system will produce to support continuous improvement and decision making?• What resources has the state committed to the development of a unified data system, or key elements of such a system (including longitudinal data system funds, state advisory council funds, and state general funds)?• Has the state identified policies and practices that will be needed to support effective use of data once linkages have been built?• How does or will the system support the professional development and other needs of EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS?• How will the state ensure ease of use by PARTICIPATING STATE AGENCIES and EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?• How is the state ensuring or planning to ensure data and compliance with privacy requirements?• How will the state ensure compliance with all of the DATA SYSTEM OVERSIGHT REQUIREMENTS?				