Educators for the 21st Century Technical Assistance Q&A Document
Dated 1-23-15
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Introduction

This Q&A document is intended to provide potential applicants to Request for Proposals 15-RFP143 with technical assistance. In cases of conflict between the language in this document and that in the most recent revision of the request for proposals (RFP), the language in the RFP prevails. The Q&A document is organized into sections corresponding to major features of the RFP. It includes questions that were raised during the 1/9/15 pre-proposal webinar as well as other questions. Questions raised during the webinar are followed by an asterisk.

Overview

The Educators for the 21st Century program is federally funded under Title II Part A Subpart 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act, which is the current authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The program is a competitive partnership grant program that funds projects providing professional development to K-12 educators. Since 2002, the Council and its predecessor, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, have funded 46 projects under the program. This year, the focus is on implementing the Smarter Balanced interim assessments.

Key Features of the Request for Proposals

A. Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments

The Smarter Balanced Assessment System consists of three major components: end-of year summative assessments, interim assessments, and a digital library of resources with built in formative assessments. This RFP is focused on use of Smarter Balanced interim assessments for instructional purposes, to provide information on student skill gaps to educators, so they can adapt instruction and curriculum or provide other supports to respond to student needs identified by the assessment.
This use of interim assessment is nearer to the formative than the summative end of the assessment spectrum. However, interim assessment differs from most formative assessment in that interim assessment data may be aggregated for use not only at the student or classroom levels but also at the school or school district levels.

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

A-1* How is this applicable for elementary teachers who teach multiple subjects?
Interim assessments are available for grades 3-8 and high school. The assessments are relevant for elementary teachers who teach multiple subjects because those subjects usually include mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy, which are the focus of the assessments.

A.2* Are interim assessments available for grades K-2?
No, interim assessments are not available for grades K-2.

A-3* Right now, the Interim score reports do not give an item analysis. Do we anticipate that they will next school year?
We do not know, and we have submitted an inquiry to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. We will provide an update when we know more.

A-4* *How* often would the interim assessment be required to be given?
You may administer them as often as you like, but they are not required. Whether or not schools will use them is a local decision.

A-5* Can you make a distinction between the Interim Block and Comprehensive?
The interim Comprehensive assessments use the same blueprint as the summative assessments, assess the same range of standards, and provide scores on the same scale. Interim Assessment Blocks focus on smaller sets of related concepts and provide more detailed information for instructional purposes. There are between five and seventeen blocks per subject per grade. Source: Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (http://www.smarterbalanced.org/interim-assessments/)

A-6 How can we gain access to the Smarter Balanced assessments and digital library?
Ask a District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) at a school district that is in your partnership for access.

B. Eligible Partnerships

Grants are awarded to eligible partnerships, consisting of at least the 3 required partners described on page 5 of the RFP, plus other optional partners if a partnership wishes. Each eligible partnership must include:

1. a private or public institution of higher education (IHE) and its division that prepares teachers and/or principals (the IHE and its division that prepares teachers and/or principals count as a single partner for purposes of meeting requirement 1);
2. a private or public IHE's school of arts and sciences that offers one or more academic majors in disciplines or content areas corresponding to the academic subjects in which the teachers served by the project teach; and
3. at least one high-need school district from the list in Exhibit F of the RFP.

Projects serving multiple target regions must serve at least one high-need school district from each target region (see RFP Section 1.4.1 Equitable Geographic Distribution of Funding). Projects providing professional development on Smarter Balanced interim assessments for both Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy must include two school of arts and sciences partners – one for Mathematics and one for English Language Arts and Literacy.

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

B-1* Can an ESD be a fiscal partner in this grant and a Mathematics and Science Partnership grant?
Yes.

B-2* Am I to understand that a school district not identified in Appendix F may participate as long as a school that does is participating?
Yes, as long as a school district identified in Appendix F is participating as a required partner, other school districts may participate too as optional partners.

B-3* How much exposure do universities have to Smarter Balanced assessments? Are they the best source for training schools on how to use these tests?
Smarter Balanced interim assessment exposure has been limited, but universities do have faculty with significant experience in the field of assessment in general. Whether or not universities are the best source depends on which university personnel you involve in a project.

B-4 Does the first required partner have to prepare both teachers and principals?
No, it has to prepare either teachers or principals or both.

B-5 Can the same university provide required partners 1 and 2?
Yes, but the partners may also come from two different universities if the project wishes.

B-6 Why is there a tenured/tenure track faculty requirement?
The first full paragraph on page 6 of RFP requires that "The project director or at least one co-director must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member of a required higher education partner. This faculty member must provide effort comparable to or greater than the effort of other key personnel in the project. All of the required partners must play key roles in planning and implementing the project; and the required higher education partners must play significant instructional roles and may not merely provide evaluation or project oversight services." The tenured/tenure track and significant instructional role requirements are intended to increase the likelihood that the project will impact not only the K-12 participants but also postsecondary programs offered by the higher education partners.

B-7 Do postsecondary faculty have to be the main instructors?
They don't necessarily have to be the "main" instructors, but they do need to have significant instructional roles. Please see the response to question B-6 above.

B-8 Can a math education professor who teaches math classes satisfy the "school of arts and sciences" requirement? *The analysis is done at the departmental level rather than the individual level. In other words, the partners are departments rather than individuals. To answer the question, we need to determine whether the math education professor truly represents the math department. If the math education teacher merely teaches a couple of math courses but does not have a faculty appointment within the math department, then the requirement probably would not be satisfied. However, if the math education teacher has a faculty appointment in the mathematics department, and it is ok with the math department for that faculty person to represent it in the partnership, then the arrangement would probably work. These kinds of questions need to be analyzed on a facts and* *circumstances basis, and it is wise to consult with the RFP Coordinator in advance so that he can give proactive guidance and consult with the US Department of Education as needed.*

C. Participants

The list of participants eligible to receive professional development under the program is fairly short: in-service K-12 teachers, highly qualified paraprofessionals (defined on page 9 of the RFP), principals, and assistant principals. Generally, professional development is for practicing educators, not pre-service educators. However, there is one exception: a pre-service teacher who is also a highly qualified paraprofessional may be a participant. If your project is serving paraprofessionals, you need to get a certification from them that they meet the definition of highly qualified paraprofessional and keep the certification on file in case you are audited. However, you do not need to submit the certification with your proposal.

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

C-1* Is the inclusion of the IHE teacher development partner intended to include teachers in training in the professional development?
Generally not. The professional development is for in-service teachers, with one exception. The exception is that pre-service teachers who are also highly qualified paraprofessionals may receive PD from the project. A highly qualified paraprofessional is defined on page 9 of the RFP as a paraprofessional who has not less than 2 years of experience in a classroom; and post-secondary education or demonstrated competence in a field or academic subject for which there is a significant shortage of qualified teachers

C-2 Can postsecondary faculty be participants? *For purposes of this program, postsecondary faculty, including community college faculty, are providers rather than participants and are not included in participant numbers in RFP forms 1-3. Although faculty will learn a lot as a result of their involvement with the project, they must play instructional roles in the project; and grant funds are to pay for their time as providers rather than as learners.*

C-3 Can superintendents and assistant superintendents be participants? *Yes, if they are also principals/assistant principals, which can sometimes happen in small districts.*

C-4 Who is considered to be an "assistant principal?"
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act does not define the term, so state and local definitions apply. It is generally safe to assume that a person with the words "assistant principal" in his or her job title is an assistant principal. Projects contemplating serving administrators without those words in their job title must document to WSAC's satisfaction that such individuals meet the local definition of the term (which would have to comply with any state definition that exists).

C-5 If there is space available in a training session, and other school or district personnel who would benefit from the training want to attend without any cost to the grant, they may do so? *Yes, as long as they are not displacing any eligible teachers, highly qualified paraprofessionals, or principals/assistant principals.*

C-6 Can coaches be participants? *The grant cannot pay for coaches as participants, unless the coaches have a classroom teaching role (in addition to their coaching role) where they work. The classroom teaching must be in the core academic subject area that the grant is focusing on. Regardless of whether or not they have a classroom teaching role, the grant may pay for coaches as providers rather than participants, for work done by the coaches in an instructional role in the professional development activities provided by the project.*

D. Required Project Goals

The required project goals are listed on page 4 of the RFP (and repeated on pages 19 and 38 for convenience). There are one primary and two supporting goals:

1. Primary Goal - Teachers of core academic subjects and also principals and/or assistant principals are able to use the state's Smarter Balanced interim assessments to improve standards-based instructional practices, improve academic achievement for all students, and close opportunity gaps.
2. Supporting Goal - Principals and/or assistant principals have the instructional leadership skills that will help them work most effectively with teachers in implementing the Smarter Balanced interim assessments to help all students master core academic subjects.
3. Supporting Goal - Teachers of core academic subjects have academic subject matter knowledge that will help them implement the Smarter Balanced interim assessments most effectively.

Projects must address all three required project goals. As long as a project focuses on addressing these goals with respect to the Smarter Balanced interim assessments, it may also address them with respect to the Smarter Balanced summative Assessments, and may provide professional development on use of the Smarter Balanced digital library in support of attainment of the goals.

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

D-1 If projects focused on addressing the goals with respect to the Smarter Balanced interim assessments may also address them with respect to the Smarter Balanced summative assessments and may provide professional development on use of the Smarter Balanced digital library, how come the Scoring Rubric (RFP Exhibit G) only contains scoring criteria that reference the interim assessments?

Because we expect projects that provide professional development on the summative assessments and digital library to do so in a way that reinforces implementation of the interim assessments. In other words, the focus of the RFP is on the interim assessment implementation. If you want to provide professional development on the summative assessments and digital library, that is fine, as long as you do it in a way that connects to the interim assessments and helps your project meet the 3 required goals with respect to the interim assessments. It is to your advantage to make these connections explicit in your RFP, so that proposal reviewers will recognize them and take them into account.

D-2 May projects provide professional development that will help teachers use the Smarter Balanced interim assessments in conjunction with other assessments outside of the Smarter Balanced system?
Yes, as long as it is done in a way that connects to the interim assessments and helps your project meet the 3 required goals with respect to the interim assessments. It is to your advantage to make these connections explicit in your RFP, so that proposal reviewers will recognize the connections and realize how your work with assessments outside of the Smarter Balanced system make your project more effective at addressing the required project goals, which are focused on the interim assessments.

Note for researchers-- Although the grant is a training grant rather than a research grant, it may generate questions for use in research papers not funded by the grant. For example: What are effective ways to employ Smarter Balanced interim assessments in combination with other assessments teachers and schools use? Are we seeing the same evidence across assessments to determine whether results are attributable to factors other than student knowledge, such as test format? How much better do formative, interim, and summative assessments work together when developed as a system rather than independently developed? And so on . . .

E. Professional Development Activities and Evaluation

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

E-1* For clarification - the school would give the interim assessments, the higher ed would provide professional development to teachers?
That is the default model for the partnerships. However, there are many variations. For example, ESD or school district staff may work in conjunction with the higher education partners to provide professional development.

E-2 The first sentence on page 19 of the RFP states “Each project must provide intensive and ongoing professional development equivalent to at least 48 contact hours for each teacher and 12 contact hours for each principal/assistant principal (and highly qualified paraprofessional, if served by the project).” Would you elaborate?

- *The term “contact hours” is left open to reasonable interpretation. Contact hours may be delivered face-to-face, online, or through a mixture of delivery modes. RFP Form 1 splits the hours into face-to-face and online components. Face-to-face means “in the same room.” On-line delivery includes videoconferencing, teleconferencing, Web-based, Blackboard, and other activities involving electronic media.*
- *The word “equivalent” was put there deliberately to allow projects to use a competency-based approach rather than a seat time-based approach. If you do use a competency-based approach, be sure to explain the equivalence the proposal. In other words, explain how the competency-based approach is equivalent to 48 hours for teachers and 12 hours for principals/assistant principals/highly qualified paraprofessionals.*

E-3 Is an external evaluator required for project-specific supplemental evaluation?
No, the supplemental evaluation may be external or internal. For example, a university partner may have faculty with evaluation expertise on its staff. Such faculty could evaluate the project. Whether internal or external, evaluators must be selected consistent with federal, state, and organizational conflict of interest rules.

F. Budget

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

F-1* What percentage of the allocation must go to higher ed partners or local educational agency (i.e. school district) partners?
There is no required percentage per partner, but there is a rule that no single partner may use more than 50% of the funds made available to the partnership (i.e. 50% of the project budget).

F-2* Can you give the allocation ratio a guess or estimate?
Each proposal reviewer will have his or her own idea of what reasonable means. In the opinion of the RFP coordinator, a reasonable ***lower limit*** *is on the order of 10% for each required partner. If you allow the percentage for a required partner to sink too low, you run the risk that that partner may not be very engaged and may actually drop out of the partnership at some point during the project. If that happens, then the partnership will no longer be eligible for funding. However, the RFP coordinator also feels that a smaller percentage might be reasonable in the case of a required partner that is a small high-need school district that has very few educators participating. For example, 10% for a high-need school district might be on the high side if the school district is only sending a couple of teachers and a principal to the professional development provided by the project.*

F-3 Can grant funding pay for the cost of a professional grant writer? *No. That is an example of a pre-award cost. Pre-award costs are borne by the applicant.*

F-4 What food and beverage costs can the grant pay for?
The grant can pay per diem costs for participants who meet the travel criteria outlined chapter 10 of Washington's State Administrative and Accounting Manual (SAAM) http://www.ofm.wa.gov/policy/ or in partner organization travel policies that are more restrictive than that outlined in SAAM. In addition, grant funding may be used to pay for working lunches (but not breakfasts, dinners, or refreshments for breaks) if approved in advance by WSAC in writing. Requests for approval must contain all information requested by WSAC, including, but not limited to an explanation of why the working lunch is necessary and why the work done during the lunch could not be done during any other time. The U.S. Department of Education has provided guidance that will inform WSAC's decisions:

- *Frequently Asked Questions to Assist ED Grantees to Appropriately Use Federal Funds for Conferences and Meetings—December 2014, available at: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/fund/guid/gposbul/gposbul.html (see questions 6-13)*

- *Guidance letter from Monique Chism letter to Pat Kaiser, available at:* [*http://www.bruman.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Use-of-Funds-meals-02-20-14.pdf*](http://www.bruman.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Use-of-Funds-meals-02-20-14.pdf)
  This letter contains several numbered criterion for use in determining whether having the grant pay for a working lunch is appropriate. Although the letter was written with regard to Title I grant funds, WSAC staff has confirmed with US Department of Education staff that the guidance applies to Title II Part A funds (such as Educators for the 21st Century program funds) as well.

F-5 Can grant funding pay for equipment, such as video equipment?
Equipment is listed as an ineligible cost in the RFP, and the federal rules governing equipment purchases are extensive and not user-friendly. As with other ineligible costs, applicants may request an exception, but this must be done proactively, before the proposal is submitted. The answer will depend on facts and circumstances. For example, inexpensive purchases, such as inexpensive software or hardware necessary for participants to participate in professional development delivered online or for real time coaching, are easier to justify than expensive items. The availability of non-purchase alternatives, such as limited duration software licenses or subscriptions, or equipment rentals will be a factor too because it is more difficult to justify a purchase if non-purchase alternatives are available. Do not include equipment purchases in your budget without prior WSAC approval.

F-6 Can grant funding pay for technical support staff?
One of the federal rules that apply generally across all costs is that costs, to be allowable, must be reasonable and necessary. This rule applies to technical support staff too. If the technical support staff are necessary for the project to succeed (for example, to help record sessions for online delivery), and their price is reasonable, then the budget may include them.

F-7 Which column on the budget form do evaluation costs go in?
Evaluation costs are considered to be "used" by the fiscal agent partner for purposes of the 50 percent rule and should be included in the corresponding column on the budget form.

G. Proposal Format

Related Q&A (* indicates question asked during the pre-proposal webinar):

G-1* Regarding the proposal narrative - can this be single spaced?
Yes, single spacing is fine, but please obey the font, margin and page limits outlined on page 14 of the RFP.