

RTTT Frequently Asked Questions

We know that a number of questions have been raised following the release of the Race to the Top (RTTT) final application and requirements. We've listed a few of them below with some preliminary responses. As more questions or more detailed responses become available, we'll redistribute this list.

Remember first to review all of the Department of Education's RTTT [application materials](#), including their [RTTT FAQs](#) (much longer than this list below), and the attached NEA Powerpoint.

Additionally, we know that some states will use the RTTT application process to move their own agenda that is permitted by RTTT but not REQUIRED by RTTT. Please review the relevant materials so it is clear what is required and what is not.

1. Does our state affiliate have “signoff” authority on the state’s application?

No. Only government officials (governor, chief state school officer, president of state board of education, attorney general) must sign off on the Race to the Top application. The state affiliate's support, however, counts for a number of points in Criterion A(2) [“State Success Factors”] of the RTTT application.

2. Do local affiliates have “signoff” authority over local (LEA) participation in RTTT?

Yes, to an extent. Local affiliate presidents are one of three individuals (along with local superintendents and school board presidents) whose signatures may be included in the “MOU” that LEAs must submit in order to be considered a “participating LEA.” While the LEA may agree to participate without including the local union signature, the absence of the local union signature must be noted on the application and will garner less points for the state. The total number and percentage of LEAs (as well as the demographics of the LEA) that “participate” in the state’s plan will be evaluated and scored under Criterion A(1) of the state’s application.

3. As a local president, will signing the MOU supersede existing contracts or agreements?

While no language in the model MOU distributed by the U.S. DOE explicitly overrides existing contracts or agreements, the question of whether the version of the MOU distributed by the state would, in fact, supersede an existing contract or agreement must be decided on a case-by-case basis. Affiliates should read the federal model MOU carefully (p. 65 of the application) as well as the state version. Some NEA state affiliates may choose to advise their locals not to sign MOU agreements without first bargaining or coming to an agreement on RTTT implementation issues in advance. What is clear is that the MOU may be altered to protect affiliates’ or members’ interests at either the local level or the state level.

4. Do teacher evaluations now have to be based “50 percent or more” on student test scores only?

No. Teacher evaluations developed as part of RTTT must be based in “significant” part on student GROWTH (not a single test score) data AND other measures of teacher effectiveness that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms or districts. This does not mean 50 percent or more. It does mean that a teacher evaluation must be based on MORE than student assessment data alone. It also must be developed with teacher input.

5. Does an LEA have to participate in the state’s RTTT plan? If so, how much?

No. The LEA may choose not to participate, or it may decide only to participate in certain parts of the state’s reform agenda. However, the extent to which LEAs participate significantly or totally in the state’s plan will be evaluated in the application.

LEAs may also choose only to be “involved” (i.e., not “participate” by signing an MOU but instead agreeing at a later time to comply with some or all statewide reform efforts). “Involved” LEAs would not receive their share of the RTTT money as a “participating LEA” would, but they may receive some money to implement the reform efforts they become associated with.

6. Can LEAs sign on after the state has a) submitted its application or b) been awarded a grant?

Yes. LEAs may sign on at any point up to 90 days after the state has been awarded a RTTT grant. It is in the state’s interest, however, to get as many LEAs as possible to sign on in advance in order to gain points in its application.

7. What areas of the state’s application could I seek to bolster for the benefit of members?

There are opportunities for interested affiliates to advocate for significant positive measures. These include:

- Input on several aspects of achieving “Great Teachers and Leaders” criterion, including teacher recruitment, retention, compensation, promotion, tenure, certification, professional development, mentoring, support
- Increased input and professional development on the development and use of high-quality standards, assessments and data systems for instructional purposes
- Input (required under RTTT) on how teacher and school leader evaluations are conducted; there also is opportunity to use the process to help develop, strengthen, or improve implementation of the evaluation system
- Support for different, innovative public school models, including union-run innovative, autonomous schools
- More resources for STEM teachers and instruction (see competitive preference priority)

- More attention to early learning, school learning conditions and other priorities (see invitational priorities)
- New resources and reforms for teachers and ESPs in low-achieving or priority schools

8. What “red flag” areas of the state’s application might I watch out for?

- Bypassing or excluding some eligible local affiliates in the state’s MOU for participating LEAs (Note: an LEA does not have to have an existing collective bargaining agreement with the local for that local to be eligible to “sign off” on the MOU)
- Skewing teacher evaluations toward student test scores only, not on student “growth” or multiple measures as required
- Does the charter school policy include ways to monitor charter school authorization, performance and student population as encouraged by the application?
- Applications that minimize “transformation” strategies in favor of the other intervention models for struggling schools
- Lack of stakeholder (including teacher and ESP) input into decisionmaking regarding struggling schools
- Teacher evaluation systems not developed with teacher input
- Teacher evaluations automatically leading to decisions on compensation, retention, removal etc., not “informing them” along with other procedures
- Not enough emphasis on the positive “Great Teachers and Leaders” Criterion, especially professional development and educator input as part of all 4 reform areas

9. How does RTTT relate to other ARRA programs?

- a) State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF). The state must receive approval over its Phases I and II SFSF application prior to receiving a RTTT award. These requirements are significant and impact schools. The Phase II SFSF application is due on January 11, 2010. All states receive between \$22 million and \$1.1 billion in extra education funding upon approval of its Phase II application.
- b) Investing in Innovation (i3). This is the \$650 million pot of money with similar goals to RTTT except it is available to LEA and nonprofit (in partnership with schools or LEAs) applicants directly. The final requirements and application procedures for i3 will be released shortly.
- c) Title I School Improvement Grants (SIG). This is a separate \$3.5 billion program for persistently low-achieving schools. The final SIG requirements for this program were released on December 3. The deadline for the state to apply for SIG funds is February 8, 2010. UNION INVOLVEMENT: Note that, unlike RTTT, for SIG the SEA (State) must consult with a "Committee of Practitioners" under ESEA Section 1903(b) prior to submitting its application for SIG funds. This committee includes "teachers, including vocational educators" but not necessarily unions. Other stakeholders may be consulted as well: "The Department recommends that the SEA also consult with other stakeholders such as potential external

providers, teachers' unions, and business, civil rights, and community leaders that have an interest in its application." This language is concerning the SIG application only, not possible union involvement prior to implementation of intervention models at the local level.

10. Our state is in the midst of working on fairly fast-track legislation to try to make us as attractive as possible for RTTT funding. The changes being looked at are very significant and would need substantial (i.e., RTTT) funds to properly implement. However, our state education agency is hesitant to make the changes contingent upon RTTT funding (i.e., a contingency "trigger") unless they have some assurance that doing so would not hurt the state's application. Will the Department provide assurance that including such a "trigger" would not hurt the application's chances?

- No. The Department has said "this is a competition and we cannot speculate on how the peer reviewers will view such a proposal." Additionally, the Department reiterated that "peer reviewers will evaluate a State's application based on the criteria. As a State writes its application, it should take into consideration the fact that peer reviewers will judge the application on the strength of how it addresses each of the criteria—which may include the strength of a State's statutory or policy frameworks and its reform plans."