FIRST THINGS FIRST

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Analysis of Successful 2011 Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant Applications

BACKGROUND

On August 23, 2011 the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (referred to hereafter as Departments) jointly released the application for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). The RTT-ELC was a competitive grant competition for a total allotment of $500 million. Arizona was eligible for up to $70 million. On the October 19, 2011 deadline the Departments received 37 applications from 35 states (including Arizona), Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Grant applications were evaluated and scored by panels of anonymous expert reviewers. On December 19, 2011 the Departments announced nine winners. Winners are listed below in order of ranking. New Mexico, though not funded, is included in this analysis because it is the highest ranked state that was not awarded, and it is most similar (geographically, culturally, and politically) to Arizona. Table 1 summarizes the ranking and scores of awarded states, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Table 1

State and Rank	Final Score (out of 300)	Percent of 300 Available Points Earned
1. North Carolina	269.9	89.9%
2. Massachusetts	267	89.0%
3. Washington	263.8	87.9%
4. Delaware	261.2	87.1%
5. Ohio	261	87.0%
6. Maryland	252	84.0%
7. Minnesota	250.8	83.6%
8. Rhode Island	243.8	81.3%
9. California	243.6	81.2%
10. New Mexico (Not funded)	236	78.7%
28. Arizona (Not funded)	186.8	62.3%

The intention of the RTT-ELC competition was multi-fold: 1) to fund emerging effective and evidence-based practices; 2) to promote collaborations within and between states; and 3) to build governance and infrastructure that would allow the rapid dissemination and scale-up of effective and evidence-based early childhood practices.

Although Arizona was not funded in this first RTT-ELC competition, the application process provided the impetus for substantial conversations between First things First and key Arizona partners such as the

Governor's Office, Arizona Department of Education, Arizona Department of Economic Security, Arizona Department of Health Services, ABOR University education deans and faculty, and community college presidents and faculty. The RTT-ELC application process created unprecedented collaborations. It is our intent to capitalize on that momentum to strategically advance collaborations that support FTF's mission and system-building efforts across Arizona's early childhood system.

Shortly after the winning states were announced, the U.S. Department of Education posted proposals from all entering states at: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/awards.html. FTF staff analyzed the proposals from all states submitting RTT-ELL applications to learn from successful applications and use our new knowledge to inform recommendations for future initiatives. The analysis in this document answers the following questions:

1. What were the common trends in states' proposals? Were states that followed those trends more likely to win the competition?
2. What, if any, innovative strategies emerged from the proposals of competition winners?
3. What, if any, of these strategies should FTF consider for potential near or long-term initiatives?

GENERAL TRENDS

Expanding and Improving Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (TQRIS). All applicants were required to describe how their states would improve their TQRIS and expand the numbers and types of early learning programs included in their quality system. Twenty states (including Arizona) proposed making participation a requirement to receive various sources of public funding. Ten of the twenty states proposed mandating participation to receive state Pre-Kindergarten or Head Start funds. Two of these states (North Carolina and Washington) were funded. Another ten of the twenty states (including Arizona) proposed a continuation of voluntary participation in TQRIS, with two states proposing this strategy winning the competition (Delaware and Maryland).

Although linking participation in TQRIS to public dollars was proposed by more than half of the applying states, doing so was not a strong predictor of winning the competition. Only four of the nine successful states proposed some linkage between participation in quality systems and public funding.

Creating "Readiness Zones." Five states (North Carolina, Delaware, Maryland, Minnesota, and New Mexico) proposed establishing "zones" or "teams" that would intensely focus resources and interventions in targeted high-needs communities. All five states proposing such zones were ranked in the top 10 applications, with four of the five winning the competition.

Collaborating Across State Lines. Five states proposed cross-state collaborative efforts. Ohio and Maryland will work together on a revision and implementation of Maryland's kindergarten entry assessment. Both states won the competition. North Carolina, Delaware, and Kentucky will collaborate to develop and pilot a new, improved TQRIS. North Carolina and Delaware won the competition.

TRENDS IN COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITIES

Infusing Early Childhood Standards and Guidelines Across the EC System. All winning states and New Mexico wrote to competitive preference priority C (1) Learning Standards, reflecting the critical importance of learning standards as infrastructure for a comprehensive early childhood system.

States with the highest ratings (Maryland, Massachusetts, Delaware, and California) all have well-established, comprehensive early learning standards. All have conducted extensive alignment studies (and several proposed new alignment studies). The hallmarks of these states learning standards systems include:

- Standards included in licensing requirements (all four top states)
- Standards infused across all professional development system components (college coursework; modules developed and available for community-based professional development)
- Use of family support mechanisms for dissemination of information to parents. Delaware, for example has developed a Calendar for Families and activity books for families (available in English and Spanish) that support families' integration of the guidelines and standards into their everyday home life.
- Inclusion of K-3 content specialists and kindergarten teachers in the development of early learning standards and guidelines.

Improving Early Childhood Professional Development. All winning states either have comprehensive Workforce Knowledge and Competency Frameworks in place or proposed the development or revision of a framework. After C (1) Learning Standards and E (1) Kindergarten Entry Assessment, D (1) Professional Development Framework was the most common competitive preference priority.

Seven of the winning applications and New Mexico wrote to D (2) Workforce Supports. D (2) contained a wide variety of innovations, and two major themes emerged: First, states either proposed to establish or expand professional development regional hubs or communities of practice. These professional development structures are designed to bring learning opportunities closer to the communities where early care and education providers live and work. Six of the winning states and New Mexico proposed training hubs and/or learning communities.

Top-ten states also proposed improving degree alignment and progression and/or developing new credentials, with an emphasis on developing leadership credentials. Four of the winning states and New Mexico proposed either expanding or establishing programs that would provide greater opportunity for formalized leadership development attached to or aligned with college degrees.

Kindergarten Entry Assessment. All winning states and New Mexico wrote to competitive preference priority E (1) Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA). Although the popularity of this priority reflects the urgency for states to know the status of children's learning as they enter kindergarten, it is likely that the additional 10 bonus points awarded for including this priority contributed to states' decisions to propose a KEA.

Several states with the highest ratings (Maryland, Minnesota, and California) have well-established, comprehensive early childhood assessment systems or kindergarten readiness assessments. Hallmarks of these states' KEA include:

- At least 10 years of kindergarten entry/readiness or early childhood data collection.
- Strong interface with nationally-known psychometric scholars at leading colleges and universities (U.C. Berkley, University of Minnesota, Erickson Institute) who have helped these states develop valid, reliable and developmentally appropriate assessments of young children.
- Maryland and Minnesota have also proposed plans to integrate KEA results into their statewide, longitudinal data system.

- Professional development systems include mechanisms or plans to create mechanisms to develop workforce capacity to administer and interpret KEA results and to use results to improve instruction.

SUMMARY OF INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

As described above, trends related to linking TQRIS to public funding, collaborating across state lines, infusing early learning standards across the EC System and implementing a KEA involve strategies that are similar across the winning applications and New Mexico. Readiness Zones and professional development strategies represent the greatest areas of innovation and potential for future FTF strategic initiatives. Table 2 summarizes the innovative trends across the winning applications and New Mexico for these areas.

Table 2

Rank	State	Creating "Readiness Zones"	Professional Development Hubs &/or Learning Communities	Leadership Development/ Degree and Credential Alignment
1.	North Carolina	Yes: Transformation Zone made up of rural communities with high needs.	Yes: Will establish learning communities with the goal to expand access to coaches.	Yes: New online master's degree in Early Childhood Leadership and Management; expand and enhance leadership development program for Smart Start executive directors (Leadership Collaborative).
2.	Massachusetts	Yes: 107 Grants for Coordinated Family and Community Engagement in high need communities; also 6 Regional Readiness Centers.	Yes: MA already has an existing system of well-established TA/PD hubs.	Yes: Develop a cadre of 90 coaches to help ECEC providers/teachers develop customized PD plans; establish an Early Educators Fellowship to provide access to a leadership institute for El Ed

Rank	State	Creating "Readiness Zones"	Professional Development Hubs &/or Learning Communities	Leadership Development/ Degree and Credential Alignment
				principals and community-based providers.
3.	Washington	No	Yes: Will establish training hubs and learning communities	Yes: Will work with Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) to align degrees to new Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework
4.	Delaware	Yes: "Readiness Teams" in target communities anchored around low-performing elementary schools. Will develop 0-8 continuums of care and services for children ages 0-8.	Yes: Will expand exiting pilot program as part of the "Readiness Teams" with learning communities of program directors meeting monthly and weekly visits from coaches.	No
5.	Ohio	No	No	Yes/No: Will "assess" their current system to determine need for credentials and to make recommendations for degree progression and alignment with Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.
6.	Maryland	Yes: Creating a "breakthrough center"; also 24 local early childhood councils guided by	Yes: will establish early learning academies for teachers working Pre-K through 2nd grade.	No

Rank	State	Creating "Readiness Zones"	Professional Development Hubs &/or Learning Communities	Leadership Development/ Degree and Credential Alignment
		public-private partnership with Annie E Casey Foundation.		
7.	Minnesota	Yes: "Target Communities" – four to start initially with plans to learn from these "pilots" and scale up throughout state.	No	No: (Minnesota's PD efforts will focus on implementing scholarship and incentive programs.)
8.	Rhode Island	No	Yes: Will expand existing networks.	No
9.	California	No	Yes: Will establish two hubs one each in Los Angeles and Santa Clara counties; will establish learning communities and mentor peers in the 16 regional consortia developing TQRISs.	No: (California already has a comprehensive Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework with an extensive system of aligned credentials.)
10.	New Mexico	Yes: Early Childhood Investment Zones"	Yes: Will convene child care providers, pre-K, Head Start, special education and kindergarten teachers in learning communities for joint trainings aligned with Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.	Yes: New Mexico has developed an innovative faculty-development collaboration with Bank Street College. New Mexico IHE faculty will have the opportunity to participate in an 18 credit hour graduate course of study in New

Rank	State	Creating "Readiness Zones"	Professional Development Hubs &/or Learning Communities	Leadership Development/ Degree and Credential Alignment
				Mexico, provided by Bank Street. Course credit will articulate to master's and doctoral programs at New Mexico State University.
28.	Arizona	No	Yes: We proposed 6 PD Hubs.	Yes: We proposed a coaching academy to strengthen Quality First coaches' skill and knowledge. We also proposed aligning degrees and credentials to a revised Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework. We did not propose new credentials. Arizona does not have a coaching or director's credential.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FTF

1. Engage leaders from western states ranked in the top ten (Washington, California, and New Mexico) in conversations to assess the potential for cross-state collaborations. Examples of potential collaborations:
   - New Mexico has formed a unique faculty development collaboration with Bank Street College. Might this be a collaboration we could leverage to improve the quality of early childhood college coursework in Arizona?
   - California has developed a robust early childhood assessment (Desired Results Developmental Profile) that they are expanding to use as their Kindergarten Entry Assessment. What we learn from their experiences developing an early childhood assessment?

- New Mexico, like Arizona, is a PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career) state. PARCC assessments will replace the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test. How might we collaborate with New Mexico to ensure the K-2 PARCC assessment is developmentally appropriate and aligns with a Kindergarten Entry Assessment, and the kindergarten version of the Arizona English Language Learners Assessment? (Note: the following RTT-ELC winning states are also members of PARCC: Massachusetts, Maryland, Ohio, Rhode Island).
- Both New Mexico and California are similar in their need to address the needs of dual-language learners, providers whose home language is a language other than English, and the preservation of American Indian languages. How might we collaborate with key partners in these neighboring states to address these regional concerns?
- Washington has plans to evaluate the effectiveness of their Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework in 2014. How might we build on their process to design our own evaluation of our revised Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework (currently under development by the PD Systems-Building Workgroup convened by FTF)?

2. Conduct an in-depth analysis of the transformation/readiness zone models proposed by funded states to determine strategies that could be adopted or adapted for future FTF initiatives. Potential analysis questions:
   - What are critical system-structures and relationships that will comprise the "zones" proposed by winning states?
   - What empirical evidence supports the configuration of these particular initiatives?
   - How will states evaluate the effectiveness of these zones?
   - How might Arizona adopt or adapt these strategies? How might we work with Regional Partnership Councils to identify "Readiness" zones and implement a suite of targeted, intensive interventions?

3. Conduct an in-depth analysis of the existing and proposed professional development strategies of funded states. The PD System-building Workgroup and Strategic Initiatives staff have already started this work. Questions guiding our analysis:
   - How have other states structured their Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework? How might their work inform the revision of our framework?
   - How do other states support the professional development of early childhood coaches?
   - What early childhood credentials (especially paraprofessional and leadership credentials) exist in other states and how do these credentials align with the Workforce Knowledge and Competency framework?
   - How are professional development hubs and learning communities configured and located?

4. Conduct an in-depth analysis of the existing and proposed strategies for infusing early learning standards and guidelines across the system. Through our collaborative work with ADE, funded by the State Advisory Council (SAC) grant, training modules have already been developed for the Early Learning Standards for 3-5 years, the Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Learning

Programs, and will be developed for the soon-to-be published Infant/Toddler Developmental Guidelines. Potential analysis questions:

- What strategies could we adopt or adapt from other states for infusing standards and guidelines across the early childhood system?
- What types of materials could we develop to support the use of the standards and guidelines among various audiences (such as teachers, higher education faculty, and parents)?

FTF will continue to track the progress of the winning states, as well as participate in national opportunities to dialogue and glean from all states' efforts toward building infrastructure and effective evidence-based early childhood practices. We will build on the conversations initiated with our state agency and other government partners last year during the RTT-ELL application development phase to advance collaborations toward improving our state early childhood system.