

Considerations for Private Colleges Regarding Race to the Top Funds

Overview: The Race to the Top initiative is a subset of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) created by the stimulus bill. The SFSF is a formula grant that will be allocated in two phases to the States to implement educational reforms to improve learning from pre-school through college. Of the total \$54 billion in SFSF funding, \$4.3 billion will be awarded competitively under the Race to the Top initiative. Applications for Phase II of the SFSF are due January 11, 2010; applications for Phase I of Race to the Top are due January 19, 2010.

Across the country, private colleges are being asked to participate in these state-based efforts, as states seek to demonstrate that they have the most inclusive set of partners possible. From our informal conversations with multiple state leaders, we would offer the following considerations for private colleges when responding to these requests.

Read Before You Sign: We are aware of numerous states in which colleges are being asked to agree to participate in the Race to the Top application, without knowing what is being proposed for educational reforms in the state. In some states, private college representatives do not have assurances they will see the application before it is submitted.

Make Sure This is a Partnership, Not an Avenue to Control. As private colleges work with their states on Race to the Top plans, they should ensure that state governments do not gain increased control of independent governance structures at our colleges, and do not force inappropriate compliance measures on our institutions. Clear lines should remain between the public and private non-profit sectors as these state plans emerge.

Equitable funding: To date, private non-profit institutions are not receiving funds from the SFSF, which were distributed via the same state education agencies writing the Race to the Top applications now. (The only exceptions are a few schools that received funds under the 18.2% of SFSF funds that may be used for modernization and renovation.) Do your institutions have assurances that your state will provide equitable resources if you participate in the Race to the Top educational reform effort?

Properly done, federally funded conversations to help break down the state level silos amongst early childhood, K-12 and higher education could have benefits for all students. If they participate in these efforts, private non-profit institutions need to ensure that they do so as equal partners and in a manner consistent with both their governance structures and institutional missions.

Additional Information: The attached sheet provides more detailed information about the SFSF and Race to the Top initiatives as well as references to additional materials.

SPECIFIC PROGRAM INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Disentangling the Programs: There is a great deal of overlap in the objectives and requirements for the SFSF and the Race to the Top initiatives—making it easy to confuse the two. Briefly, SFSF funds are allocated by a formula—so that all States that meet the requirements will receive the funds. Race to the Top funds will be awarded on a competitive basis—with only the most highly rated applicants receiving funds.

Both programs center on the four education reform efforts specified in the stimulus bill: (1) standards and assessments; (2) Improving the collection and use of data; (3) improving teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution; and (4) turning around struggling schools.

Data Systems: Both programs require the creation of state longitudinal databases and increased data collection by state education authorities. They refer to yet another federal law—America COMPETES—in describing the list of data elements to be included in state longitudinal databases. So far, this data is only required from public K-12 systems, and public in-state higher education systems¹. And, so far, the federal educational privacy rights law (or its implementing regulations), FERPA, has not been amended to remove any of the current obligations private colleges have to students regarding protection of records.

A portion (\$350 million) of the Race to the Top funds will be awarded competitively under a separate Race to the Top Assessment competition. These funds will support the development of statewide longitudinal data systems.

Teacher Effectiveness: In order to be eligible for Race to the Top funds, a State must not have “any legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers at the State level to linking data on student achievement or student growth to teacher and principals for the purposes of teacher and principal evaluation.” Any institution that agrees to participate in Race to the Top teacher preparation activities should obtain a clear understanding of how student performance information will be used in assessments of the institution’s teacher preparation program.

More Detailed Information: The Department of Education has a great deal of information about the Race to the Top on its website at: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>. Of particular help is the Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions document, which may be found at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/faq.pdf>. Relevant **Federal Register** publications include:

July 29, 2009 (Part III)

Race to the Top Fund (Notice- pages 37804-37)

State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) Program (Notice - pages 37837-72)

Grant program from Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (Notice inviting applications for new awards - page 37872-76.)

November 12, 2009

State Fiscal Stabilization Fund Program (Final Rule - pages 58435-525.)

November 18, 2009

Race to the Top Fund (Notice inviting applications for new awards for FY 2010 - pages 59835-72.)

¹For discussion of this issue, see page 58451 of the November 12, 2009, Federal Register.