

New York State Guidebook

for 21st CCLC Peer Reviewers

New York State Education Department
Peer Review Process
Round 5
April - May 2009

Foreword

This Guidebook is meant to assist you, the reviewer, in understanding the peer review process and your responsibilities as a reviewer. It also provides important guidelines for reviewing the applications.

Instructions for Reviewers

Dear Reviewer,

Thank you for your willingness to review 21st Century Community Learning Centers proposals for New York State's 2009 Round 5 funding competition. The New York State Education Department (SED) as well as the grant applicants are depending on you to read each of the proposals carefully, score fairly, and maintain confidentiality throughout the peer review process. Below is a list of items you will find in your reviewer's packet, with instructions and guidance about how to use each form.

Statement of Confidentiality: Please read and sign the statement of confidentiality. Mail back to SED immediately in the addressed envelope provided.

Statement Regarding Conflict of Interest: You will receive an email with a list of proposals that you have been assigned to review. If you have a conflict with any proposal based on the Conflict of Interest form, please contact SED immediately. If there are no conflicts please sign the form and return it along with the signed Statement of Confidentiality in the addressed envelope provided.

NYS Guidebook for Peer Reviewers: The Reviewer Guidebook contains background information about NCLB Title IV Part B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers, eligibility, program requirements, technical information, evaluation criteria for reviewers and an overview of the review process. *Please read this document in its entirety prior to reviewing any proposals.*

Demographic Perspectives from Around the State: Information has been gathered from existing programs around New York State to help reviewers get a sense of demographics, culture, challenges and benefits from many points of view. Depending on what geographical area you are reviewing and/or if your proposals are from a school district or a community organization, take some time to review information that may pertain to that particular region.

Scoring Guidelines for Reviewers: The Scoring Guideline contains the scoring rubric with adjoining information on what constitutes an excellent, good, fair or weak score for each element of the proposal. This document will be every helpful in discerning the difference between levels of quality.

Sample Technical Review Form: A sample review form is included in this guidebook. The actual fill-in review form will be sent to you by email along with your reviewer code.

Quick Notes:

21st Century applications were submitted on a CD. The CD was then uploaded onto the SED server to allow access by the assigned reviewers.

You will receive an email that contains your own individual password and reviewer code along with instructions on how to access the applications you have been assigned to review. It will also include the fill-in Technical Review Form to be used for each application.

If the CD contained more than one file, e.g., the program narrative, the budget, etc., these individual files have been placed together in a folder before it was uploaded to the server.

All application components are included on the files provided to you. However, when evaluating the application, you should only review the five sections of the Program Narrative, the Partnership Agreements and the FS-10 Budget Form.

You do not need to check for the required signatures. Some applications will show scanned signatures while others won't show any. SED has already verified that the paper copy of the application contained the required original signatures.

Although applicants may follow the formatting guidelines perfectly, sometimes the formatting was not maintained when the application was uploaded to the server. See the review guidebook for further discussion about formatting.

Helpful Links: The following links may help round out your knowledge about the 21st Century application process and the ten essential elements of successful programming.

- Link to the RFP: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/funding/pastrfps0809.html> The posting also includes the questions received from the applicants and SED's responses.
- Link to the Quality Self-Assessment Tool: <http://www.nysan.org/content/document/detail/1991/> Each 21st Century program is to conduct this self-assessment two times each year.
- Link to the Technical Assistance Webinar (in Word format): www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss
This webinar was made available to all potential applicants during the competition.

Contacting SED: We understand that you may need SED guidance in order to move forward in reviewing a proposal (e.g., allowable activities, budget discrepancies, formatting issues). SED staff will be available to answer questions each weekday, between 9am and 4 pm. Call 518-486-6090, and please ask for either Linda Woodward or Betsy Kenney.

Please check your email frequently. SED will forward to all reviewers any questions received, along with the answers, as well as any clarifying information that may be of help to all reviewers.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE APPLICATION PROCESS

A. Background

With the reauthorization in 2001 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the responsibility for administering the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program was transferred to state education agencies. This program supports after-school programs and other extended learning opportunities (before-school, weekends, summers, etc.) for students and their families. Its fundamental goal is to provide a comprehensive array of programs and services through collaboration between schools and community partners. By providing academic enrichment and positive youth development opportunities to students, as well as family literacy and other educational programs for families of these students, these programs can make a significant contribution to closing the achievement gap in our neediest schools.

The U.S. Department of Education strongly encourages a peer review of applications to help ensure that proposed projects are worthwhile and that the review process is objective, fair and impartial. Your reviews are the foundation of higher level State Education Department funding decisions. As a result of your efforts, a select number of high quality applications will be funded for a period of five years. The Guidebook for 21st CCLC Program Application Reviewers is intended to improve the quality of application reviews and make your task easier by clarifying your responsibilities and sharpening your review skills.

B. Statutory Basis of the 21st Century Program

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is authorized under Title IV, Part B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Its purpose is to create or expand community learning centers that:

- (1) provide opportunities for academic enrichment, including providing tutorial services to help students, particularly students who attend low-performing schools, to meet State and local student academic achievement standards in core academic subjects such as reading and mathematics;
- (2) offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities, such as youth development activities, drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, art, music, and recreation programs, technology education programs, and character education programs, that are designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students; and
- (3) offer families of students served by community learning centers opportunities for literacy and related educational development.

A Community Learning Center must be located in a safe and easily accessible facility. It must offer services when school is not in session (before school, after school, during holidays or summer recess). The applicant must address how students will travel safely to and from the center and home.

C. Eligibility

Any public or private organization is eligible to apply for 21st CCLC funding. This includes public school districts, BOCES, charter schools, private schools, nonprofit agencies, city or county government agencies, faith-based organizations, institutions of higher education, and for-profit corporations. Priority will be given to applicants whose programs will serve middle level and/or high school students who attend schools that are currently identified as being in school improvement status. SED will check each application before the peer review to verify the eligibility of the schools and determine whether priority points may be awarded.

The applicant must demonstrate that its proposed program was developed and will be carried out in active collaboration among all partners including the eligible school(s) the students attend. A partnership signifies meaningful involvement in planning, as well as specific individual or joint responsibilities for program implementation. Each applicant/fiscal agent must submit, as part of the application, a signed Partnership Agreement (see Appendix 2) with each of its partnering agencies.

D. Definitions

Local Education Agency or LEA is usually synonymous with a school district. It is an entity defined under State law as being legally responsible for providing public education to elementary and secondary students. *For the purpose of the 21st Century funding competition, an LEA can also be a BOCES, nonpublic school or charter school.*

Community-based organization or CBO is a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that (a) is representative of a community or significant segments of the community; and (b) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community.

BEDS Codes – Each school building in New York State has its own unique identifying number code (assigned by the State Education Department) that is used for data reporting, payments, etc. BEDS stands for Basic Educational Data System. The BEDS code for each school is to be included on the Participating Schools Form

Indirect Costs are costs of activities that benefit more than one program or objective and, therefore cannot be readily assigned to only one specific program or objective. Indirect costs are generally classified under functional categories such as general

maintenance and operation expenses, general office and administration expenses, general overhead expenses and other allowable general expenses.

Purchased Services is the budget category for services to be provided by an organization or individual that cannot be provided by the applicant. Examples include transportation, instruction for an activity and the independent evaluator. There is no limit on the percentage of grant funds that the applicant can use for Purchased Services; however, the applicant must have an active role in the implementation of the program. The NYSED Consortium Policy for State and Federal Discretionary Grant Programs further defines the required active role of the applicant. The policy can be found in the first part of the 21st Century funding announcement at www.emsc.nysed.gov.

E. Program Requirements

All 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) must have three strands of program activity: academic enrichment, youth development and family literacy/educational programs for participants' families. In addition, programs are to be designed to reflect the 10 essential elements of high quality after school programs outlined in the Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool that was developed by the New York State Afterschool Network. The QSA Tool is available at www.nysan.org.

- Environment and Climate
- Administrative and Organization
- Relationships
- Staffing and Professional Development
- Programming and Activities.
- Linkages Between the School Day and After School Programs
- Youth Participation and Engagement
- Parent, Family and Community Partnerships
- Program Sustainability and Growth
- Measuring Outcomes and Evaluation

SED requires all 21st Century programs to conduct the QSA two times each year for self-assessment and planning for program improvement. It provides an opportunity for program leaders and key staff, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to utilize a common set of standards to assess, plan, design and execute strategies for ongoing program improvement. The 10 essential elements of high quality after school programs listed below are the foundation for all professional development provided to 21st Century programs by SED, its Statewide 21st Century Technical Assistance Center and Regional Student Support Services Network Centers.

Additional information about the QSA Tool and other resources are available online at www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/ by clicking on the link for 21st CCLC.

The activities listed below are allowable in 21st Century programs. They are intended to

advance student achievement, positive youth development and services to families. Consistent with the goal of providing a comprehensive array of programs and service, applicants are strongly encouraged to incorporate several of these activities in their proposals.

- Remedial education activities and academic enrichment learning programs, including providing additional assistance to students to allow the students to improve their academic achievement
- Mathematics and science education activities
- Arts and music education activities
- Entrepreneurial education programs
- Tutoring services (including those provided by senior citizen volunteers) and mentoring programs
- Programs that provide after-school activities for limited English proficient students that emphasize language skills and academic achievement
- Physical fitness and wellness activities, nutrition education
- Telecommunications and technology education programs
- Expanded library service hours
- Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy
- Programs that provide assistance to students who have been truant, or suspended, to allow the students to improve their academic achievement
- Drug and violence prevention, counseling programs and character education programs

F. Competitive Priorities

When you receive the applications to review, SED will have already verified the applicant's eligibility for funding and determined its competitive priority, if any.

1. Absolute Priority:

Programs must primarily target students who attend schools that are eligible under section 1114 for Title I school wide programs or schools that serve a high percentage of students from low income families.

2. Competitive Priority:

Section 4204(1) of NCLB requires that competitive priority be given to applications:

- proposing to target services to students who attend schools that have been identified as schools in need of improvement (SINI) under NCLB, Section 1116, and
- submitted jointly by eligible entities consisting of not less than one local education agency receiving Title I, Part A funds and a community-based organization or other public or private entity.

Additional competitive priority will be given to programs that serve middle-level students or high school noncompleters – i.e., high school students who have dropped out or who are at risk of not meeting the graduation requirements to earn a diploma – who attend SINI schools.

The priority for middle-level students is intended to encourage programs in the middle level grades where current state assessment data reveal significant achievement gaps. Applicants will be expected to propose programs that reflect a balance of activities between academic enrichment and youth development, as well as featuring interagency collaboration. Given the physical, emotional and psychological changes experienced by early adolescents, it is especially critical that programs and strategies be developmentally appropriate. In addition, youth development opportunities can provide positive ways to channel the needs of these students for exploration, personal expression and self-determination.

The priority for high school noncompleters is intended to encourage high school programs with a special focus on students who are at risk of not meeting the graduation requirements for various reasons including, but not limited to, low credit accumulation, difficulties with the required state assessments or attendance problems. In addition to receiving academic enrichment, many of these students would benefit from a broad array of programs and services including service learning to help them overcome these barriers to learning. Programs may also include efforts to reach out and serve students who have already dropped out of high school, but who would like a second chance to earn a diploma by re-enrolling in school.

II. PEER REVIEW TECHNICAL INFORMATION

A. Introduction

The New York State Education Department receives applications in confidence and protects the confidentiality of their contents. Every effort is also made to avoid any situation that would present a conflict of interest for a reader. Abuse of confidentiality and undetected conflict of interest undermines the entire review process. Please read this section carefully. You will be required to sign a statement of confidentiality prior to beginning the review. If you have concerns regarding any application you may be assigned to read, you are responsible for reporting this matter to the 21st Century program staff immediately.

B. Confidentiality

The entire grants review process is confidential. You may not discuss an application or your written comments or scores with anyone else before, during, or after your review. Do not, under any circumstances, contact an applicant to obtain further information.

Reviewers' comments are also confidential. Please use your reviewer code assigned by the State Education Department on all review forms.

Review forms are never provided to applicants before the reviewers' names have been deleted. A list of reviewers' names may be furnished, however, if requested.

C. Conflict Of Interest

The 21st CCLC Program staff attempt to eliminate any situation that would present a conflict of interest for a peer reviewer. All reviewers will be assigned to review proposals outside of their funding pool (New York City, Big 4 Cities or Rest of State). All reviewers must sign a statement of "no conflict" prior to beginning the peer review process.

Before you receive the applications for review, you will receive an email that lists the applications being assigned to you. Please review this list. If you have a conflict or think you may have a conflict, contact the 21st Century Program staff immediately. Also respond quickly by return email to verify that you have not identified any potential conflicts of interest.

Review assignments may be changed if necessary. Circumstances that could be called a conflict of interest may or may not exclude you from serving as a reviewer. If, at any time, you think you may have a conflict of interest, contact 21st Century program staff immediately.

Conflicts of interest may arise if:

- An application has been submitted for this competition in which you or your spouse will benefit financially from grant funds (if awarded).
- You or your spouse are affiliated with an organization that submitted an application, but you will not benefit financially from that application.
- An applicant named you as a consultant in an application with or without your prior knowledge.
- A situation exists that may be perceived as a conflict, such as reviewing proposals from your region of the State, reviewing proposals in which a family member (other than your spouse) stands to benefit financially, reviewing proposals from an organization or individual with whom you are negotiating employment, etc.

D. Freedom of Information Act

Each applicant can request to receive a copy of the reviewer comments for his or her application. The public may also request individual reviewer comments under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Therefore, as you write comments, be aware that the Technical Review Forms will be sent to the applicants and may be sent to the general public. Even though your name is removed when the forms are made public, you must exercise care when writing comments. It is important that your comments are *clear, legible, well justified*, and that they reflect *a thorough review of the entire application based on the selection criteria governing this application*.

III. GETTING STARTED

The applications have been stored on the Department's server for easy access by the peer reviewers. You will receive an email that contains your own individual password and reviewer code along with instructions on how to access the applications you have been assigned to review.

The applications you receive for review will contain the items listed below. ***The first three items (in italics) are not to be reviewed.*** Please review all others.

- *The Application Checklist (A-1)*
- *The Capacity Determination Form (A2-3)*
- *Required federal and State assurances.*
- Application Cover Page (A-4) – Includes the applicant's signature.
- Table of Contents (A-5) – Provides page numbers for various parts of the application.
- Partnering Agencies Form (A-6) - Partnership agreements are to be submitted for the listed partners of the program.
- Private School Consultation Form (A-7) – Documentation that private schools have been offered the opportunity to participate in the applicant's program.
- Participating Schools Form (A-8) – All schools that have students participating in the program. The principals of those schools must sign this form.
- Program Summary Form (A-9) – A summary of the applicant's funding and program experience and a brief checklist about the proposed program.
- Program Site(s) Form (A-10) – Applicants list the site(s) where the program will actually take place.
- Program Abstract – A one-page summary of the proposal.
- Program Narrative – A detailed description of the proposed program.
- FS-10 Budget for first year only, 7/1/09-6/30/10 – The required budget form that allocates funds to various categories such as salaries, supplies, etc.

- Partnership Agreement(s) – Attached to the application. There should be one for each partner listed on the Partnering Agencies Form. Sometimes there will be one Agreement signed by more than one partner. If that is the case, the Agreement must clearly delineate which partner is responsible for which activities.

Note: Applicants were directed **not** to submit supplementary materials such as letters of support, videos, publications, press clippings, testimonial letters, etc. because they will **not** be reviewed. Any that were included in the application package have been discarded. If by chance you find one, please disregard it.

IV. EVALUATION CRITERIA, DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES, SCORING GUIDELINES AND THE TECHNICAL REVIEW FORM

A. Evaluation Criteria

The Program Narrative should respond to each of the five sections listed below.

- 1) Need for Project (12 points)
- 2) Quality of Project Design (38 points)
- 3) Quality of Program Evaluation (14 points)
- 4) Organizational Leadership and Quality of the Management Plan (16 points)
- 5) Adequacy of resources (20 points)

Each section has a maximum point value and contains specific evaluation criteria that have individual point values. You will determine the number of points to be awarded to each of the criteria, signifying Excellent, Good, Fair or Weak.

Excellent Specific and comprehensive. Complete, detailed, and clearly articulated information as to how the criteria are met. They will include well-conceived and thoroughly developed ideas.

Good General but sufficient detail. Adequate information as to how the criteria are met, but some areas are not fully explained and/or questions remain. Some minor inconsistencies and weaknesses.

Fair Sketchy and non-specific. Criteria appear to be minimally met, but limited information is provided about approach and strategies. Lacks focus and detail.

Weak Does not meet the criteria, fails to provide information, provides inaccurate information, or provides information that requires substantial clarification as to how the criteria are met.

As a reviewer, you are responsible for using only the evaluation criteria on the Technical Review Form to guide your rating of the applications. Sometimes the applicant will

incorporate the response to one of the criteria in a different section. It is appropriate for the reviewer to evaluate and credit that information even though it is not in the expected section.

B. Demographic Perspectives

Appendix 1 contains demographic perspectives that may be reflected in the applications. These perspectives are intended to provide a sense of the communities that are to be served by the 21st Century program. Perspectives pertain to rural communities; the Big Four Cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers; Long Island; and an overview of the structure and organization of the New York City Department of Education

C. Scoring Guidelines

Appendix 2 has more detailed guidelines on how to determine whether the applicant's response to each of the criteria is Excellent, Good, Fair or Weak.

D. The Technical Review Form

Appendix 3 is a sample Technical Review Form. As you evaluate an application you will provide written comments and numerical scores for each of the evaluation criteria. You will enter these comments and scores on an electronic Technical Review Form that you will submit electronically to the Department.

The Technical Review Form consists of a cover page, summary page and a comment/score sheet for each selection criterion in each of the five sections of the narrative.

- The Cover Page includes your name and any comments about the application that you want to convey to the State Education Department. These are never shared with the applicants or anyone outside the Department.
- The summary page contains the scores for each of the five sections and the total score.
- The review forms identify all criteria for each section and provide space for reviewers to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the applicant's response. The reviewer determines and records numerical scores reflective of those strengths and weaknesses.

The numerical scores you assign to an application's response to the selection criteria must be consistent with the comments you write. Comments and scores should reflect the same overall assessment. You should never pair a negative comment with a positive score, or vice versa.

Check your scores to make sure that you have written them correctly and used the appropriate point scale. You should also double-check the scores on the summary page of the Technical Review Form to ensure that they match the scores you have given for each section and that the final total has been computed without error.

V. THE REVIEW PROCESS

A. State Education Department Responsibilities

The State Education Department is responsible for identifying projects that best address the specific educational needs targeted by legislation. The responsibilities of the 21st Century Program staff who administer the peer review process include the following:

- Receive applications and verify eligibility and priority status of each
- Recruit and select peer reviewers
- Assign applications to reviewers
- Provide informational materials to prepare the reviewers for their responsibilities
- Provide technical assistance to the reviewers
- Verify final scores and recommend applications for funding
- Approve budgets and assist in the preparation of grants and grant contracts.

B. Reviewer's Role

Each application will be reviewed by three reviewers. Each reviewer is asked to read approximately seven or eight applications. Reviewers are selected by the 21st Century Program on the basis of their general and specialized experience in a program area. Reviewers are expected to draw upon their expertise in evaluating applications according to the scoring criteria included in the application package. The reviewer is the primary source of objective assessment and bears a large responsibility for making an accurate evaluation. Peer reviewers are expected to:

Before you start your review, consider the number of applications you must review and the amount of time allotted for your review. Then, decide how much time you can spend on each application. Some applications may require more time, others less; establishing a maximum number of hours for review will ensure each application receives sufficient attention.

Reading Tips

- Read with a purpose.
- Focus on information related to the criteria.
- Skim over nonessential information.
- Concentrate on key words/phrases.
- Read critically.
- Read quickly.
- Don't try to memorize.

- Take notes, if necessary.
- Relax and clear your mind of personal concerns.
- Minimize distractions.

C. Formatting Requirements

Formatting errors will result in considerable penalties - e.g., the proposal will not be reviewed in its entirety or the proposal will be rejected. The following requirements were included the RFP.

- The Program Narrative cannot exceed 30 double-spaced pages, paginated, using one-inch margins and Times New Roman standard font in 12-point.
- The allowed 30 pages includes the “Template for Goals and Objectives Based on 21st Century Community Learning Centers Performance Indicators” (Appendix 7). The Template for Goals and Objectives may be single spaced in Times New Roman, standard style, in 12-point type using one-inch margins.
- Charts can be used ONLY to display numerical data or activity schedules. Charts may be single spaced but must be in Times New Roman, standard style, in 12-point type using one-inch margins.
- Other types of charts are not allowed. Charts cannot be used for narrative purposes.
- The 30 pages do not include the Budget (FS-10), Partnership Agreement(s) or commitment letters that will result in additional funding or other support for the program.

Although applicants may follow the formatting guidelines perfectly, sometimes the formatting isn't maintained when the document is saved on a CD. Therefore, please take particular note the following:

- The narrative is relatively close to 30 pages, double spaced and in a reasonably sized font for reading.
- The Template for Goals and Objectives is included.
- Other charts are used only to display numerical data or activity schedules.

Please contact 21st Century program staff immediately if you have serious concerns about the formatting of an application.

D. Analysis of Applications

Every application will respond to the evaluation criteria to some degree. Your task is first to locate the relevant response and then to analyze the quality of that response. Your analysis should be an objective appraisal that focuses on *how well* the application responds to the selection criteria.

Guidelines:

- The applicant's intentions must be clear and specific, not obscured by meaningless jargon.
- The ideas presented must flow logically.
- The application must provide a complete response to the selection criteria.
- The activities outlined in the different sections of the application must be consistent with each other.
- The activities proposed by the applicant must be consistent with current, accepted knowledge and ideas in that field.
- Formatting requirements have been followed.

E. Writing Comments

Your comments should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of an application's response *to the evaluation criteria*. Although you may find many additional strengths and weaknesses as you read, you are not expected to comment on each one.

Thorough evaluations of an applicant's responses to the selection criteria are very important. Comments should not simply describe what the application says. Comments must evaluate the application content concisely, clearly, and comprehensively. Be sure to differentiate comments based on fact from those based on professional judgment.

Guidelines:

- Be specific.
- Evaluate rather than simply describe.
- Document your evaluation.
- Be tactful.
- Write legibly.
- Use complete sentences.
- Use proper grammar and spelling.

VI. After the Review

- The 21st CCLC Program staff receives the reviewers' written evaluations, verifies their adequacy, and enters the scores into a database. Fundable programs (those that receive a score of at least 75 points) are then separated by geographic pool (New York City, the "Big Four" cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers or the Rest of the State) and ranked by score. 21st Century program staff prepare written funding recommendations for approval by the Department.
- Upon approval, the 21st Century program office notifies successful applicants and announces the awards.
- Funding begins July 1, 2009 for a period of five years.

- The 21st CCLC Program provides copies of reviewers' evaluations to all applicants who request them. EDGAR regulations entitle all applicants to receive such copies. In addition, applicants may receive a list of all the reviewers' names; however, evaluations are not attributed to specific reviewers.
- The 21st CCLC Program staff monitors the programs throughout the five-year funding period.