

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)  
Priority Partners for Turnaround, Condition 9 (Students' Social, Emotional and Health Needs)  
Review Process**

**Background/ Context**

Priority Partners for Turnaround is Project 6A of the Massachusetts Race to the Top Initiative. The purpose of this project is to support district and school turnaround by developing a list of ESE- approved Priority Partners for Turnaround that serves as a resource and “preferred vendor” list for districts and schools. Level 3 and 4 districts and schools participating in this project can access Race to the Top Funds to support partnerships with providers on the Priority Partner list. Only those providers with a proven track record and demonstrated effectiveness in accelerating school improvement will be selected for Priority Partner status.

ESE will be issuing a series of Priority Partner for Turnaround RFQs, each with a particular emphasis on a Condition for School Effectiveness. Based on feedback solicited from Level 4 districts, the first RFQ seeks responses from providers with demonstrated effectiveness in working with schools to address Condition 9: Students' Social, Emotional and Health Needs. Subsequent RFQs will address priority Conditions identified by districts.

**Review Process**

The review process outlined below will result in the identification of Priority Partners for Turnaround that meet the qualifications set forth in the RFQ for Condition 9 (Students' Social, Emotional and Health Needs).

**Review Team Members**

The review team will consist of five people for the review of written proposals. This team will include external and internal reviewers with relevant expertise and experience. Additional ESE staff with area expertise will be brought in for the management interviews, described below.

**Training**

The review team will participate in a training session, facilitated by ESE, to orient members to all aspects of the review process and to participate in a joint scoring activity.

**Two-Tier Review Process**

Submissions will be evaluated through a two-tier review process, described below. All proposals will be part of Tier One; the top scoring proposals will move to Tier Two.

***1. Tier One Evaluation: Initial review of written proposals***

A formal review of each proposal will be conducted using a standard process and scoring rubric to assess the following qualification areas: Defined Theory of Action; Experience and Willingness to Collaborate for Turnaround; Ability to Build Capacity for Sustained Improvement; and Proven Outcomes Based Measurement Plan.

A subset of the review team will read and score each proposal. The outcome of each review will include: 1) a Tier One evaluation score, based on the combined scores of the reviewers; 2) a summary of strengths and weaknesses; 3) a set of questions and/or areas for further clarification to be addressed.

The full review team will convene after all proposals have been reviewed and scored by teams. The purpose will be to develop a shared understanding of each proposal's team score, strengths/weaknesses, and areas in need of further clarification; based on this information, the review team will come to agreement about which proposals will proceed to the Tier Two Evaluation.

## **2. Tier Two Evaluation: Review of Demonstrated Record of Effectiveness and Financial Capacity**

For each of the proposals that meet the minimum score for advancing to Tier Two, based on the scorecard results of Tier One evaluation, the review process will proceed with a thorough evaluation of the applicant's demonstrated record of effectiveness and financial capacity. In addition to the evidence submitted in the written proposal, customer reference interviews will be conducted to gather additional, first-hand evidence of effectiveness. An ESE review team member, using a standard protocol and reference interview rubric, will conduct interviews. The interviewer will score the results; detailed notes will be shared with one other member of the review team.

A subset of the review team will score each proposal on these criteria. The result of the review will be: 1) Tier Two evaluation scores, based on the combined scores of the team members on the written submission and interviews; 2) a set of additional questions or areas in need of further clarification, if not already identified through the Tier One review process; 3) based on the combined results of the Tier One and Tier Two evaluation, providers will be invited to participate in a management interview.

### ***Provider management interview***

Based on the results of the Tier One and Two evaluations, management teams of the top proposals will be asked to participate in an interview with the review team. The interview will include both standard questions and customized questions based on the review of written proposals and reference interviews. The purpose of the interview will be to clarify key issues; solicit additional information; and evaluate understanding of Priority Partner for Turnaround expectations. The management team may also be asked to submit an amended proposal that reflects the feedback and expectations shared by the review team during the interview.

### **Recommendations for Selection as Priority Partner for Turnaround**

After management interviews are completed, the full review team will convene to make recommendations for selection as a Priority Partner for Turnaround, based on the combined results of the Tier One and Tier Two evaluations and the management interviews. Recommendations will be made to Deputy Commissioner Karla Baehr, who will make the final selections of Priority Partners.

### **Review Process Timeline:**

The review process is designed to ensure rigorous vetting of each proposal. In an effort to complete the process in a timely manner so that districts can begin to use Race to the Top Funds for these partnerships, the timeline for the review process outlined above will be a compact one, as follows:

May 4	RFQ posted
May 16	RFQ responses due
May 31 – June 1	Tier One Evaluation
June 6-10	Tier Two Evaluation
June 13-17	Management interviews
Week of June 19	Priority Partners selections announced

*Note:* Interested providers are invited to respond to Priority Partner RFQs on a rolling basis. Responses that do not meet the initial deadline will be reviewed and a decision made within 3 months of submission. Providers seeking Priority Partner status must be pre-approved by ESE, which will also be done on a rolling basis.