

Introduction to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Framework

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Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	1
ARRA Framework Overview	3
ARRA Framework Design.....	4
ARRA Framework Interpretation	6
References.....	8
Resources	9

Introduction

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 provides unprecedented opportunities for states to design and implement long-term, innovative educational reform.

Within ARRA, there are a number of education grant funds with specific and targeted priorities; however, there are four, interconnected assurance areas that provide the foundation for each funding stream.

- **Standards and Assessment.** Internationally benchmarked college and career readiness standards
- **Data Systems.** Improvement in the collection and use of data to inform decision making and instruction, including longitudinal data systems
- **Teacher Effectiveness.** Increase in teacher and leader effectiveness and improvement in distribution of great teachers and leaders to the schools most in need
- **Struggling Schools.** Supports for struggling schools with a focus on turning around the lowest performing schools

The U.S. Department of Education has indicated a strong expectation that states will need to address their current status and plans for future development with regard to each of these four reform areas as required for the receipt of ARRA funds. In a June 2009 speech, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “We will ask you to show us how you will build a coherent strategy around these four reforms to produce a world-class education system—not just for some kids but for all kids” (Duncan, 2009b, p. 7).

This emphasis on a coherent, coordinated, and comprehensive strategy in approaching the utilization of ARRA funds was echoed when the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program was announced in July 2009. The U.S. Department of Education will be “scrutinizing state applications for a coordinated and deep-seated commitment to reform...these four reforms are interrelated, so that one reform reinforces the others” (Duncan, 2009a).

For states to truly take full advantage of these opportunities, they must develop a set of core strategies to drive the application processes. States must develop this strategic approach under multiple short timelines because of the need to move stimulus dollars to communities and states in a timely fashion.

With financial support from the Stupski Foundation, Learning Point Associates has developed the ARRA Framework as a tool to help states in their strategic thinking as they plan for the use of ARRA funds. The ARRA Framework is not intended to prescribe the “right” path for the development of advanced strategies; however, it does provide some areas for states to consider.

Consideration of the strategies listed in the more advanced stages of the ARRA Framework will not necessarily improve the chances of receiving funding from the U.S. Department of Education; however, Learning Point Associates has extensive experience in working with states on school reform issues and has taken a leadership role in disseminating the most current ARRA

information. Learning Point Associates also is working directly with several states in the direct pursuit of ARRA funds, and that experience has been applied to the Framework.

Due to differences in capacity or other unique current or historical conditions, each state falls at a different place on a continuum of progress in each one of the four assurance areas. The ARRA Framework is meant to assist states in describing their current status and, more importantly, to provide guidance to states in mapping their progress to more advanced, integrated stages of practice and policy.

The ARRA Framework was developed to help states think through this vital issue of coherence. ARRA planning teams may want to consider some of the following general questions before exploring ways for states to meet the qualifications for funding.

Sense of Urgency

- To what degree is there a sense of urgency in the state education agency (SEA) about student needs not being met?
 - Is that sense of urgency targeted at certain districts?
- To what degree is that urgency shared by other education leaders in the state? By state policymakers?

Agreement Versus Resistance

- To what extent is there agreement on the direction that education reform should take in the state?
- How much resistance to new initiatives can be anticipated by various stakeholder groups?
 - Local practitioners
 - State policymakers
 - Professional organizations
- How much resistance is caused by lack of information about need?
- How much resistance is based on perceived loss (control, status, money)?

Coherence Versus Fragmentation

- To what extent are current initiatives working together coherently?
- To what extent can funding streams be coordinated for maximum impact?

ARRA Framework Overview

The ARRA Framework, a five-stage developmental continuum for each of the reform priority areas, was designed to assist states in assessing and determining their current position and to help stimulate thinking on what more developed reform strategies might look like. The Framework also provides a comprehensive mechanism for states to document and establish their progress on both the state reform conditions criteria and the state reform plan criteria of the Race to the Top grant application. In addition, the Framework will support states in the collection and documentation of the required data and progress reporting requirements of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF).

The ARRA Framework was not developed in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education; however, its most current expressed expectations with regard to ARRA funds have been studied and included to the extent possible. These expectations include those outlined in the notice of proposed priorities or the final notice of priorities for each of the ARRA grant funds as well as information provided through U.S. Department of Education speeches, press releases, and technical assistance events.

ARRA Framework Design

The ARRA Framework sets out five stages of progress for each of the assurance areas. For each stage, there are general descriptors along with information regarding the types of activities to be considered in each stage. There are descriptors for the first four stages only. The ARRA Framework is organized into the five stages; however, it is possible and, in many cases, probable that states will make nonlinear progress along the developmental continuum. States are encouraged to promote and enact bold, systemic redesign, and movement along the stages will look different in each state depending on its specific context.

Stage 1

Stage 1 describes baseline practices under each of the four assurances outlined by the U.S. Department of Education that will be the focus of states receiving ARRA funding. Stage 1 might typically find states dealing with conceptualizing and planning the work in an assurance area. States may have plans in place to come into compliance with requirements, but there may only be limited evidence that support is in place for implementing the plan. The descriptions of the baseline practices in Stage 1 may include requirements for the first or second round of SFSF funding or prerequisite changes needed to meet Race to the Top guidelines. Some states may have put in considerable effort to get to Stage 1. Though that preliminary work was important, in many ways, it will serve as a precursor to future state work.

Stages 2–4

Stages 2–4 describe levels of improved and innovative practice regarding different topics under each of the four assurances. Aspects of federal guidance concerning funding sources, including the State Longitudinal Data System, Race to the Top, and SFSF, may be incorporated into the descriptors in these stages.

Stage 2

Stage 2 descriptors tend to capture evidence that states have moved forward with the implementation of various initiatives but have not fully established the support structures or reached the level of refinement needed for successful implementation or routine usage. Several states are at this stage with regard to longitudinal data systems. Much of the technical infrastructure and data elements may be defined or in place, but the system may not yet be yielding reports of value to all constituencies.

Stage 3

Stage 3 is the logical next step at which implementation work in an assurance area has become more effective and usage is more routine. For example, a state may have a system in place to provide support for struggling schools for those in some regulatory jeopardy. That support system may include state-directed help in analyzing where interventions are most needed, providing state-directed support for program development, and offering leadership training. However, there may be no such system for districts or schools not in regulatory jeopardy.

Stage 4

Stage 4 consists of taking implementation to scale and making the next-stage revisions that grow from initial implementation. The leading indicator of Stage 4 might be the true integration of initiatives across the four assurance areas. For example, the data gathered on student and teacher success are used to target statewide design and implementation of professional development when a gap in successful teaching strategies is identified. The data might also trigger the need for more explicit statewide curriculum guidance. Advances in standards may trigger demands for changes in the way teacher effectiveness is considered and the need to prepare and develop teachers with better capacity to support and assess more complex student performance. There will be an expectation to see coherence among the initiatives in the four areas, which is most often not present today.

Stage 5

Stage 5 is reserved to communicate a stepping-off place for genuine innovation, systems change, and redesign, whereas Stages 2–4 deal with building out current systems. It is intentionally left blank to leave room for imaginative approaches that may not be a part of formal conversations today. Although the current system is driving toward best practice, innovation may require strategies that more directly support development and controlled experimentation.

Subcategories

Within the standards and assessment and teacher effectiveness assurance areas, the stage descriptors have been organized into the following subcategories based upon key emergent themes or natural cognitive divisions.

- Standards and Assessment
 - Standards. Descriptors of policies and practice related to strengthening and aligning college and career readiness standards
 - Assessment. Descriptors of policies and practice related to strengthening and redesigning state assessment system
 - Implementation Support. Descriptors of policies and practice related to supporting schools and districts in the implementation of new standards and assessment systems
- Teacher Effectiveness
 - New Teachers. Descriptors of policies and practice related to securing a new teacher.
 - Career Teachers. Descriptors of policies and practice related to supporting current teachers
 - Leaders. Descriptors of policies and practice related to supporting school leaders

ARRA Framework Interpretation

The ARRA Framework was developed to stimulate thinking and help states in their strategic planning for their Race to the Top and other ARRA funding opportunities. The Framework can assist states in describing their current status, provide guidance in mapping their progress, and help identify data for collection and reporting.

State work teams, using the ARRA Framework, can begin to articulate their current status for each assurance area on a continuum ranging from basic requirements to systemic integration. The Framework includes key concepts that are reflected in the ARRA funding requirements. States might also consider the following general questions regarding state policy and practice while using the framework and creating state plans.

Engagement

- To what extent are stakeholders engaged and supportive of reform efforts?
- Have stakeholders been involved in the planning process?
- Are stakeholders at the local and community level engaged in the process of reform?

Impact

- How will the state show that these initiatives have been successful?
- Have impact measures been created before reform initiatives are implemented?
- Are initiatives being fully implemented?
- Is full implementation apparent across the system?

Support

- To what extent is support offered to improve performance in all districts?
- To what extent are support systems integrated across assurance areas and funding streams?
- Does the SEA allocate staff based on support needs rather than funding stream?
- To what extent is support offered on a just-in-time basis?

Funding Coherence

- Is money from various funding streams coordinated?
- Are various funding streams brought together and used to create maximum impact in targeted areas?
- To what extent are financial allocations across multiple funding streams fully integrated? To what extent do they work cohesively toward common goals?
- Does the SEA allocate staff based on support needs rather than funding stream?

Sustainability

- How will programs continue to be funded after ARRA funding ends?
- Is there a plan for program continuation after ARRA funding ends?

Innovation

- To what extent is there a culture of innovation at the state level?
- Are innovative ideas readily accepted?
- Are innovative ideas quickly integrated into current practice?
- Do innovative ideas quickly replace current practice?

Collaboration

- To what extent have stakeholders been part of the planning process?
- To what extent are stakeholders engaged?

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