

# **REVIEWER HANDBOOK**

## **2008 Improving Teacher Quality Program (ITQP) Grant Competition**

**Title II, Part A, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

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## **I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

### Purpose

The purpose of the Improving Teacher Quality Program is to help states and school districts ensure that all students have effective teachers; that is, teachers with subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills necessary to help all children achieve to high academic standards, regardless of individual learning styles or needs.

### Goals

The main goals of the program include:

- Ensuring that teachers and highly qualified paraprofessionals have subject matter knowledge and teaching skills to be effective in the target subjects;
- Improving student achievement by increasing teacher effectiveness; and
- Ensuring that low-income children and minority students are not disproportionately taught by inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers.

### Eligibility

Eligible grant applicants must represent a partnership composed at a minimum of:

1. an accredited Minnesota private or public institution of higher education (IHE) and the division of the institution that prepares teachers;
2. a school of arts and science within the IHE; and
3. a high need Minnesota school district.

### Program Academic Focus and Priority

The designated core academic subjects for support are mathematics, science, civics and government, economics, history, and geography. For grants in mathematics, priority will be given to proposals meeting program requirements and designed to prepare K-8 teachers to improve the preparation of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students for algebra I and more rigorous mathematics courses in high school.

## **II. REVIEWER REQUIREMENTS**

### Confidentiality

Applicants submit their proposals to the Office of Higher Education with the assurance that the information provided is available only to the individuals involved in the proposal review process. In order to assure that a review has been carried out fairly, any materials you use, or information you obtain, must be kept secure. This section addresses the most common issues and questions that reviewers have regarding confidentiality.

### During the review

- You can discuss proposals with the OHE program director at any time during the review process and with fellow panelists during the panel meeting;
- You may not discuss scores, written comments, or the grant proposals with anyone else *before, during, or after* the panel review;
- You may not contact applicants during the review process under any circumstances; and
- You may not divulge the names of the other reviewers, the names of applicants, the number of proposals received, or the reviewer scores outside of the panel meeting.

### After the review

- You must destroy any notes that were taken during the review of the proposals;
- You must destroy any copied or printed documents from the proposals;
- You must delete all electronic files that were created and are associated with the review process; and
- You must not discuss any details relating to any of the proposals you reviewed.

### Conflict of Interest (or Appearance of a Conflict of Interest)

A conflict of interest is a relationship between a proposal reviewer and another party that could affect or appear to affect the reviewer's ability to impartially assess grant proposals.

Prior to reading your assigned proposals, review the list of proposals that you will review and ensure that you do not have a conflict of interest. A reviewer has a conflict of interest when:

- The reviewer has agreed to serve as an employee or consultant on a project for which funding is being sought in a proposal under review, or has been offered the opportunity to do so and has not yet accepted or declined, based on whether a grant is awarded;
- The reviewer's personal financial interests will be affected by the outcome of the competition;
- The reviewer helped prepare a proposal in the competition, *even if the reviewer has no financial interest in the outcome of the process*; or
- The reviewer has a relationship with an entity or individual that has a financial interest in the outcome of the competition.

Read and complete the Conflict of Interest for Grant Proposal Reviewer form (Appendix A). Return the form to Dr. Nancy B. Walters at the OHE.

### Freedom of Information Act

The intent is for each applicant 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 or enter comments electronically, be aware that the Proposal Review Forms will be sent to the applicants. Even though your name does not appear on the forms, 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 program.

### III. SCORING THE APPLICATIONS

#### Reading the Proposals

Each panel will be assigned six to eight proposals to read. Prior to discussing a proposal with your panel, you must independently read and score the application against the selection criteria and submit scores and recommendations to OHE program staff.

#### Scoring Guidelines – Key Principles

There are five key principles to keep in mind when scoring proposals:

1. Evaluate the proposal against the published selection criteria.
2. Evaluate the proposal on the information contained in the proposal. In scoring a proposal, you may only consider the information contained in the proposal.
3. Each factor is weighted equally. You may not give more weight to one factor over another.
  - EXAMPLE: Criterion #2 – Plan of Operation – is worth a total of 30 points. There are six factors, each worth 5 points.
  - EXAMPLE: Criterion #1 – Demonstrated Need – is worth a total of 30 points. There are five factors, each worth 6 points, if the applicant has previously received grant funding. If the applicant has not received grant funding before, there are four factors, each worth 7.5 points.
  - NOTE: You must use whole numbers when assigning scores. Therefore, you should always “round up.”
4. When assigning a score, start at “the middle” and add or subtract points depending on the quality of the response.
  - EXAMPLE: Criterion #2 – Plan of Operation – is worth a total of 30 points. There are six factors, each worth 5 points. When scoring this section, start with the assumption that the proposal is of average quality. Assume ~ 2.5 points for each factor and adjust your score up or down, depending on the quality of the response.
5. You may only assign 0 points to a criterion or factor if it is missing or not addressed at all.

#### Writing Comments

- The numerical scores you assign to a proposal’s response to the selection criteria must be consistent with your comments. Therefore, if a criterion has almost a perfect score, you should have substantially more strengths than weaknesses.
- If the proposal is poorly written or organized, it should be noted in the General Comments, but if the relevant information is found *anywhere* in the proposal, it should be considered in the score.
- Indicate the page number (when referring to a specific part of the proposal).
- Write or electronically enter comments that are clear, legible, and well justified.

- Write comments that reflect a thorough review of the entire proposal.
- Use complete sentences and thoughts.
- Clearly state “No strengths” or “No weaknesses” when applicable.
- The comments should evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, not just simply rehash the information contained in the submitted document.

The Selection Criteria

The following is an overview of the selection criteria and the maximum points that may be awarded for each criterion.

	Maximum Points
1. Demonstrated Need and the Improvement of Teacher Effectiveness	(30 total points)
2. Plan of Operation	(30 total points)
3. Evaluation Plan	(15 total points)
4. Resource Adequacy, Partnership’s Commitment, Quality of Personnel	(15 total points)
5. Budget and Cost Effectiveness	(10 total points)

Below are the selection criteria you will use to evaluate the proposals you have been assigned. This information will be covered more in-depth at the orientation session.

<p><b>1. DEMONSTRATED NEED AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS</b></p> <p>Factor 1: Evidence of planning involving all members of the partnership.</p> <p>Factor 2: Evidence of documentation on how the specific needs of participating schools were determined.</p> <p>Factor 3: Evidence that proposed activities address documented, real needs of participants in high need, low performing schools.</p> <p>Factor 4: Evidence that project design provides a measurable improvement in participant’s teaching and instruction in the targeted discipline and measurable improvement in student learning.</p> <p>Factor 5: Evidence that positive change is documented in participant’s teaching and content knowledge from previous ITQ projects conducted by applicant. (Note: This factor is only applicable for previous ITQP grantees.)</p>	<p><b>(30 points)</b></p>
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**Scoring Guidelines:**

Missing	Poor	Fair	Average	Very Good	Excellent
0	1-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-30

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**2. PLAN OF OPERATION**

**(30 points)**

Factor 1: Evidence that goals are reasonable and clearly linked to demonstrated needs.

Factor 2: Evidence that proposed objectives reflect Minnesota Academic Standards and program funding priorities for content knowledge and teaching skills improvement.

Factor 3: Evidence that proposed activities and project evaluation reflect project goals and objectives.

Factor 4: Evidence that proposed activities are research based, reflective of effective professional development, and will have a demonstrable impact on student achievement and teacher distribution.

Factor 5: Evidence that methods and practices will be used to help participants have specialized knowledge and skills to be effective with students from high need, low performing schools.

Factor 6: Evidence that the recruitment plan ensures participation by high need, low performing schools.

**Scoring Guidelines:**

Missing	Poor	Fair	Average	Very Good	Excellent
0	1-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-30

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**3. EVALUATION PLAN**

**(15 points)**

Factor 1: The extent to which the proposed method of evaluation is objective and adequately measures achievement of goals and effectiveness of activities.

Factor 2: The extent to which the proposed method of evaluation assesses the connection between teacher in-service and classroom practice and student outcomes.

Factor 3: The extent to which the proposed method of evaluation assesses the project's impact on student achievement.

**Scoring Guidelines:**

Missing	Poor	Fair	Average	Very Good	Excellent
0	1-3	4-6	7-8	9-12	13-15

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**4. RESOURCE ADEQUACY, PARTNERSHIP'S COMMITMENT, QUALITY OF PERSONNEL**

**(15 points)**

Factor 1: Evidence that resources are adequate to meet project's objectives.

Factor 2: Evidence that the proposing partnership demonstrates commitment to the project and documents a management plan to achieve the objectives on time.

Factor 3: Evidence that the project staff has qualifications and experience appropriate for their assignments.

Factor 4: Evidence that the staff size and time commitment are appropriate for a quality project.

**Scoring Guidelines:**

Missing	Poor	Fair	Average	Very Good	Excellent
0	1-3	4-6	7-8	9-12	13-15

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**5. BUDGET AND COST EFFECTIVENESS (10 points)**

Factor 1: The extent to which the budget is clear, concise, and justified by the budget narrative.

Factor 2: The extent to which the budget is cost effective and reflective of RFP and project objectives.

Factor 3: The extent to which additional resources are provided, such as in-kind support, school district support, and funds from other local, state, and national sources.

**Scoring Guidelines:**

Missing	Poor	Fair	Average	Very Good	Excellent
0	1	2-3	4-6	7-8	9-10

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#### **IV. PANEL MEETING**

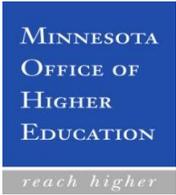
Prior to the panel meeting, read through the proposals, prepare comments, and assign scores and funding recommendation. Call or email your scores and funding recommendations to Kelly Gibson at: (651) 259-3906 or [kelly.gibson@state.mn.us](mailto:kelly.gibson@state.mn.us) by 12:00 noon on Friday, December 12, 2008. For the panel meeting, come prepared to discuss the scores you have assigned to various proposals and the reasoning behind your scoring. The purpose of the panel is to come to consensus and to use the expertise of other panel members to help you determine your level of comfort in your assessment of the quality of the proposal. During and after the discussion, you will be able to change your scores, as well as your comments, if you so desire.

#### **V. AFTER THE PANEL MEETING**

At the end of the panel meeting, the project director will go over details for wrapping up the review. Among these will be instructions for returning or disposing of any materials used during the review process.

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## **APPENDIX A**



## Conflict of Interest for Grant Proposal Reviewer

*This is the standard Conflict of Interest form to be used for all grant proposal review committee members. The creation and implementation of this form is in response to the best practices stated in the Office of Legislative Auditor’s report “State Grants to Nonprofit Organizations,” January 2007.*

The purpose of this form is to give all grant proposal reviewers an opportunity to disclose any conflicts of interest, or potential for conflicts of interest, that exist during a grant proposal review process. It is the grant reviewer’s obligation to disclose any conflicts to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) staff person in charge of the review process. The grant reviewer is not required to explain the reason for the conflict of interest as this form is considered public information; however, it is helpful. **A disclosure does not automatically result in the grant application reviewer being removed from the review process.**

Please read the description of conflict of interest below and mark the appropriate boxes that pertain to you and your status as a reviewer for this Request for Proposals (RFP) *(fill in title of RFP and program name)*

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### Conflict of Interest (or Appearance of a Conflict of Interest)

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- The reviewer has a relationship with an entity or individual that has a financial interest in the outcome of the competition.

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I certify that I have read and understand the description of conflict of interest above and (check one of the three boxes below):

I do not have any conflicts of interest relating to this program’s grant applicants or proposed projects, and I will participate in the review process.

OR

I have reviewed the list of applicants, and I have an actual or potential conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest. I will still participate in the review process, and I will abstain from scoring, discussing, and making decisions on any issues in relation to the applicants listed below. *(You may describe the nature of your conflict and state any and all applicants with which you have conflict in the space below, but it is not required. It is considered public information.)*

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OR

I am unable to participate in this review process.

If at any time during the review process I discover a conflict of interest, I will disclose that conflict immediately to *(fill in the name of the OHE staff person in charge of the review process)*:

Reviewer's printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**OHE Program Staff Use Only:**

I certify that the issue of Conflicts of Interest has been discussed with the reviewer, and the following actions have been taken:

- Reviewer has no conflict(s) and will fully participate in the review process.
- Reviewer has disclosed a conflict(s) but will continue to participate in the review process. The reviewer will not be given any applications to review from those applicants with whom he/she has a conflict. The reviewer has been instructed to avoid discussing the applicant and/or applications from agencies with which the reviewer has a conflict of interest with other reviewers.
- Reviewer has disclosed conflict(s) and will not be participating in this review process in any manner.

OHE staff signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return your completed Conflict of Interest form to the OHE program person who has been identified as the RFP contact person. Thank you!**

(This form was adopted from the 2007 Minnesota Department of Health's Conflict of Interest for Grant Application Reviewer Form.)

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