



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[Docket ID ED-2026-OESE-0364]

Comprehensive Centers Program

AGENCY: U.S. Department of Education.

ACTION: Final priorities, requirements, and definitions.

SUMMARY: The Department of Education (Department) announces final priorities, requirements, and definitions under the Comprehensive Centers (CC) Program, Assistance Listing Numbers (ALNs) 84.283B and 84.283D. We may use one or more of these priorities, requirements, and definitions for competitions in fiscal year (FY) 2026 and later years. These final priorities, requirements, and definitions are intended to redesign the CC program to better meet its statutory purpose to provide high-quality capacity-building services to State, regional, and local educational agencies and schools that improve educational opportunities and outcomes, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction for all students.

DATES: The final priorities, requirements and definitions are effective [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Michelle Daley.

Telephone: (202) 987-1057. Email:

OESE.ComprehensiveCenters@ed.gov.

If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability and wish to access telecommunications relay services, please dial 7-1-1.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose of this Regulatory Action: On March 3, 2026, the Department published a notice of proposed priorities, requirements, and definitions (NPP) in the *Federal Register* (91 FR 10353). Through this regulatory action, we establish final priorities, requirements, and definitions that the Department may use for competitions in FY 2026 and later years. To the extent not otherwise specified or incorporated herein, this NFP supersedes and revokes the 2024 Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria (2024 NFP) published in the Federal Register on May 13, 2024 (89 FR 41498) and the 2019 Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Performance Measures (2019 NFP) published in the Federal Register on April 4, 2019 (84 FR 13122). As discussed below, following the publication of these priorities, requirements, and definitions, the Department may decide to end the current CC awards and run a grant competition to award new CC grants in FY 2026 or in subsequent fiscal years.

Summary of the Major Provisions of This Regulatory Action: The NPP contained background information and our reasons for proposing the priorities, requirements, and

definitions. There are changes between the proposed priorities, requirements, and definitions and the final priorities, requirements, and definitions established in this notice of final priorities, requirements, and definitions (NFP), as discussed in the *Analysis of Comments and Changes* section in this document.

Purpose of Program: The purpose of the CC program is to provide capacity-building services to State educational agencies (SEAs), regional educational agencies (REAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and schools that improve educational opportunities and student outcomes, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction for all students, particularly for groups of students with the greatest need.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 9601 *et seq.* and 20 U.S.C. 6674.

Public Comment: In response to our invitation in the NPP, the Department received comments from 49 commenters on the proposed priorities, requirements, definitions, and directed questions.

Generally, we do not address technical and other minor changes, or suggested changes that the law does not authorize us to make under applicable statutory authority. In addition, we do not address general comments regarding concerns not directly related to the proposed priorities, requirements, or definitions.

Analysis of Comments and Changes: An analysis of the comments and of any changes in the priorities, requirements, and definitions since publication of the NPP follows.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Comments: Multiple commenters expressed general support for the proposed priorities for the CC program. A few commenters noted the opportunity for further individualization based on State needs in the proposed model and made suggestions to strengthen the federal technical assistance infrastructure to align more closely with State-identified needs. A few endorsed the concierge style role of the National Center. One commenter appreciated the Department's effort to reduce administrative burden on States by streamlining technical assistance, and noted this model further decentralizes services to ensure access in rural and urban centers serving students with the highest need. Several commenters noted the importance of service providers with appropriate expertise, including deep expertise in implementation and demonstrated results working with State and local clients in improving student outcomes.

Discussion: We appreciate the commenters' support for the priorities. The Department appreciates the support for the prioritization of providing high-quality capacity-building services to State, regional, and local educational agencies

and schools that improve educational opportunities and outcomes, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction for all students. We agree with the importance of applicant expertise in implementation and note Application Requirement 4 which requires applicants to demonstrate expertise in the current research on adult learning principles, coaching, and implementation science. We also emphasize that applicants should have experience working with State and local clients and amend Application Requirement 1 to include demonstration of results in similar projects as evidence of the applicant's ability to provide effective capacity building services.

Changes: We amend Application Requirement 1 to include demonstrating results from prior experience.

Comments: Several commenters discussed the aspects of the notice that promote alignment between the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and Regional Centers, including geographic alignment, alignment of funding cycles, and operational coordination. A few commenters suggested that stronger regional alignment and coordination between RELs and CCs will reduce State burden and further clarify the distinct roles of each provider in supporting State's needs. One commenter noted the proposed priorities would improve coordination and promote greater coherence between the RELs and Regional Centers.

A few commenters also recommended clarification on

distinct roles of Regional Centers and RELs where there might be overlapping work. They highlighted the importance of having structures that support continuity of staff, consistent points of contact, collaboration essential for meaningful systems change, strong understanding of the policy, demographic, and operational contexts of the States they serve, the ability to respond to emerging State and federal priorities, and; staffing models support both rapid-response support and sustained, and in-depth engagement. A few commenters recommended establishing joint coordination and collaboration between RELs and the Comprehensive Center Network (CCNetwork).

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' general support for stronger coordination and agrees that close collaboration between the RELs and CCs is necessary to successfully meet the needs of States and utilize program resources most effectively. We appreciate the commenters that shared preferences for stronger regional alignment to reduce burden on State agencies, support stronger alignment of REL and CC work to State priorities, and more explicitly differentiate support from RELs and CCs. The Department agrees that, where functions align, RELs and CCs can achieve efficiencies in working together to support States in their assigned regions, such as through joint planning, coordinated support of State Learning Agendas, and having a joint Governing/Advisory

Board so that both programs advance work driven by State-defined priorities and promote coherence and strategic use of program resources.

We appreciate comments regarding opportunities for stronger coordination between RELs and Regional Centers. The REL and CC programs, both authorized under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-279), are related programs with distinct but complementary functions in supporting State educational systems. The RELs are responsible for conducting applied research and developing and disseminating activities, as well as providing related technical assistance. The CCs focus on capacity-building support to facilitate, implement, and provide sustainable evidence-based policies and practices. The Department highlights that Program Requirement 1 for Regional Centers requires collaboration with the REL serving their region, including joint annual planning and establishing joint advisory boards, and Program Requirement 2 for Regional Centers requires partnering with the REL serving their region to work with States to develop or refine State Learning Agendas, which serve as a basis for both REL and CC annual planning. We believe the existing requirements provide a strong basis for ongoing collaboration within the priorities and requirements and do not believe additional changes are needed.

Changes: None.

Comments: A few commenters noted their concerns regarding potential duplication of efforts of Centers within and beyond the CC program and the importance of strong coordination across the CCNetwork, with most comments focusing on the potential role of the National Center in mitigating concerns with duplication and coordination. One commenter argued that issues of duplication of efforts across CCs and RELs and other federally funded initiatives stemmed from a lack of coordination through a single, clearly authorized coordinating entity and suggested this was not sufficiently addressed in the proposed priorities. Another commenter noted the risk of duplication of work created by the overlap in the approach of both RELs and the National Center to manage a cadre of subject matter experts. Additionally, one commenter noted that clearly defining the roles of each type of CC would reduce the possibility of duplicating efforts in service provision across the CCNetwork.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' feedback regarding the need to reduce or eliminate duplication of efforts across technical assistance providers and ensure strong coordination of services across the CCNetwork. We appreciate the opportunity to clarify and discuss the rationale of how the priorities, requirements, and definitions reduce duplication of effort, particularly through Priority 1 and program requirements related to the

National Center. Under Priority 1, the National Center will serve as a lead coordinator across the CC programs to ensure that all technical assistance provided by Centers reflects State-driven technical assistance priorities, reduces burdens and barriers to service for States and beneficiaries, and reflects efficient use of program resources, which includes efforts to reduce duplication of effort both within the CC program and with other Department technical assistance. This function will also include supporting coordination with RELs, including through supports for regional Learning Agenda development, identifying and coordinating support for national needs, and supporting dissemination of information, tools, resources, and best practices across CCs and RELs.

However, the Department agrees that further clarification related to the role of the National Center in reducing duplication and advancing coordination would be helpful to improving client experience, grantee operations, and efficient use of program resources. Specifically, the Department amends Priority 1 to clarify and enhance the coordination responsibilities for the National Center, including promoting overall alignment and coherence of CCNetwork services, conducting analyses of common high-leverage problems, and developing tools and resources to support service delivery across Centers. The Department additionally specifies that the National Center should

support multi-State coordination, as needed, and should limit its own service delivery to needs identified through analysis of data, in consultation with its Advisory Board, that are not being addressed by other Centers, to avoid potential duplication.

The Department also amends Priority 1 to explicitly include responsibility to conduct a national needs analysis, to share this information with other Centers for planning purposes, and to use it to inform the identification of high-leverage problems for its own service plan, in consultation with its Advisory Board. To align with these amendments to Priority 1, the Department has added a new Program Requirement 1 for the National Center to clarify that National Center should focus on developing tools and resources to support coordination and collaboration in its first project year, and we have amended Program Requirement 3 for the National Center to incorporate the requirement to conduct and publish annual synthesis of common high-priority needs across states each year of the National Center's grant. The Department also amends the Application Requirement 1 for the National Center to include these additional coordination responsibilities.

The Department also appreciates the feedback from commenters related to the importance of coordination across the CCNetwork, including related to Regional Centers and

Content Centers. We highlight that Proposed Priority 2: Regional Centers requires that Regional Centers must effectively work with the National Center, the REL in their region, federal technical assistance providers and Content Centers as appropriate to avoid duplication of efforts. Importantly, the program requirements for both Regional Centers and Content Centers include a focus on coordination with other CCs and other technical assistance providers. Regional Centers must, under the requirements, coordinate with the REL serving their region, including through joint planning and establishing a joint advisory board. Given the focus on coordination within these elements for Regional and Content Centers, the Department does not believe edits to Priority 2, Priority 3, or the requirements for Regional Centers or Content Centers are needed to address the commenters' feedback. The Department will also provide ongoing support to grantees to support efforts to prevent and address any concerns related to duplication.

Changes: The Department updates Priority 1 language to specify that National Center services must address evidence-based national needs not already addressed by other federal investments and to include additional coordination responsibilities as noted above. The Department also amends the Program Requirements for the National Center to add a Requirement for the National Center to develop tools and resources to support

coordination and collaboration, and to amend Program Requirement 3 for the National Center to include language to conduct and publish an annual synthesis of common high-priority needs across States, and to share this information with all Centers to identify potential opportunities for support. The Department also amends Application Requirement 1 for the National Center to ensure the required description of the approach to coordination incorporates the coordination responsibilities described in Priority 1 and the Program Requirements for the National Center.

Comments: Several commenters discussed the potential of the State Learning Agendas to strengthen federal technical assistance and create stronger alignment to State-identified priorities. A few commenters specifically noted the potential for this strategy to support a customer-driven Regional Center model anchored in State Learning Agendas, that will produce stronger State partnerships and support continuity across provider transitions by grounding Regional Center work in sustained State priorities. One commenter recommended that Regional Centers should focus on addressing high-leverage problems identified through States' Learning Agendas as they work with their States on State-directed service plans.

However, a few commenters raised considerations related to the implementation of the State Learning Agendas and suggested areas where additional clarity may be needed.

One commenter noted that additional clarity would be needed related to oversight and reporting requirements if Regional Centers would be expected to directly work with clients other than through State-directed service plans. A few commenters noted that improved coordination across Regional Centers, Content Centers, the National Center, and RELs would be needed to effectively implement State Learning Agendas, and urged the Department to clearly define roles, expert capacity expectations, and processes to support the development and use of State Learning Agendas.

Discussion: The Department appreciates commenters' feedback regarding the role of Regional Centers to support State Learning Agendas and agrees that State Learning Agendas may serve as an important lever to provide high-quality technical assistance on State-identified high priority topics. The Department emphasizes that, under Priority 2 and Program Requirement 2 for Regional Centers, Regional Centers are expected to partner with the National Center and the RELs serving their regions to develop or refine, as appropriate, a multi-year State Learning Agenda to identify needs and set priorities. We intend this requirement to be flexible to accommodate States that may already have Learning Agendas, those that do not but wish to develop one, or to accommodate States with other forms of articulated priorities, such as a Strategic Plan, that demonstrates the State's priorities, educational goals, and

commitments. The Department recognizes that the development of a Learning Agenda may require significant engagement from the State and believes it to be an appropriate use of significant CC and REL resources to support Learning Agenda development. As discussed above, the Department has amended the National Center priority to include a focus on coordinating and refining tools and processes for Learning Agenda development to build on the current tools and processes under development in a current Learning Agenda pilot, in a manner that can be utilized and adapted by all RELs and Regional Centers. The Department expects the National Center to support RELs and Regional Centers in working with their States to develop Learning Agendas, such as by producing and adapting tools and resources, providing additional expertise, as needed, sharing examples of model Learning Agendas, or convening States across regions, as needed. The Department intends that Regional Centers should develop their annual service plans as an outgrowth from the priorities established by States in their Learning Agendas and gather feedback from key stakeholders including Chief State School officers, SEA leaders, TEAs, LEAS, educators, student and parents to reflect the most pressing needs of all States within the region to be served. The Department will provide programmatic oversight and guidance on program reporting requirements to grantees post-award and does not believe that changes to the priority or requirements

related to State Learning Agendas are needed.

Changes: None.

Comments: Several commenters suggested a preference for States as applicants for Comprehensive Center grants in a future grant competition, connected to the Department's goal to ensure that the program is aligned with State priorities. A few commenters noted their support for using the Secretary's Supplemental Priority on Returning Education to the States, published on September 9, 2025 (90 FR 43514), as a Competitive Preference Priority in the next grant competition, with a few commenters suggesting that the Department encourage States as lead applicants or lead consortium partners for applications under Priority 3: Content Centers and Priority 2: Regional Centers.

Commenters identified potential benefits to State-led CCs such as strengthening accountability to State leadership, ensuring Center priorities are aligned with State needs, and reducing the administrative burden on States by allowing States to partner with established technical assistance providers for administrative and compliance support while maintaining client-led priorities at the forefront of the work.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the feedback from commenters on the potential benefits of State-led centers. Consistent with the program statute, we affirm that States are eligible entities under Section 9602(b) of the

Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (ETAA) and that States may choose to serve as the lead applicant under this program. States may also apply as consortium partners in collaboration with other eligible entities, depending on the design of the grant competition. We also appreciate the feedback on the ways the Department can prioritize applications from States for CC grants. Because there is a current Secretary's Supplemental Priority on Returning Education to the States that the Department could use in the upcoming competition to prioritize applications from SEAs, tribal education agencies, other relevant state or tribal organizations or agencies, or those endorsed by governors or chief State education officials, we do not believe that any changes to the priorities are needed.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter urged the Department to consider incorporating school safety measures into the current CC priorities to ensure that federal and State safety measures are not only adopted but operationalized effectively at the school level.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the feedback from the commenter. While we agree with the commenter on the importance of school safety, the Department's intent is to focus the priorities in this notice on the statutory purposes of the CC program, while not overly prescribing certain topics for support proactively to ensure that State

and local needs can drive the services areas of the CCs. We note that, as written, the Content Center priorities do not preclude the Department from proposing a Center focused on school safety as an Emerging Needs Center, nor do they preclude applicants from proposing such a Center under the Field-Initiated focus area, if there is demonstrated need for support from CC clients on the topic. Similarly, should States choose to prioritize school safety as a need for support, CCs could provide support or partner with other federal providers to address State needs. As such, we decline to add school safety measures as a required focus area across the priorities, but emphasize that, to the extent that this focus area is aligned to the purpose of the program and identified as an area of need by clients, CCs may support clients in the adoption and implementation of school safety measures.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter raised several procedural concerns with the Department's proposed rulemaking action, notably that the proposed priorities, requirements, and definitions impose binding grant conditions on grantees. The commenter argued that ED should publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking with a 60-day comment period and more extensive Regulatory Impact Analysis. Additionally, the commenter raised concerns that the Department imposes undisclosed information collection burdens; that the proposed

rulemaking action constitutes a major rule requiring congressional submission given the program's funding level; and that the Department's analysis of the rulemaking action does not provide a reasoned explanation including alternatives considered and an assessment of reliance interests. The commenter disagrees with the finding that the rulemaking action is not considered a significant action under Executive Order (EO) 12866 and argues that it should trigger a deregulatory offset pursuant to EO 14192; additional Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) review; cost accounting for all new grantee information collection and compliance requirements; an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis; and an analysis of how burden will be reduced by eliminating existing requirements in place of the new requirements established in this action.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' feedback but disagrees with these assertions. The Regulatory Impact Analysis section of the NFP explains that this priority is determined by OIRA to not be economically significant and that application submission and participation in competitive grant programs that might use these priorities, requirements, and definitions is voluntary. With respect to the commenter's request for additional OIRA review and expanded cost accounting, the agency notes that the information collection and compliance

obligations associated with this rule have been reviewed consistent with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA). Pursuant to those obligations, we believe, based on the Department's administrative experience, that entities preparing an application for this program would not need to expend more resources than they otherwise would have in the absence of these priorities, requirements, and definitions, as most potential costs result from statutory requirements and those we have determined are necessary for administering the Department's programs and activities, and that potential costs to applicants would be de minimis. The Department also clarifies that the priorities, requirements, and definitions contain information collection requirements that are approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Generic Application Package for Departmental Generic Grant Programs (OMB control number 1894-0006) consistent with the requirements of the PRA. The priorities, requirements, and definitions are accounted for in the currently approved data collection. Additionally, the Department clarifies that the program has in recent years received annual appropriations of no higher than \$50-\$55,000,000, which falls below the threshold to require Congressional Review under the Congressional Review Act. Moreover, the Department notes that reliance interests and alternatives considered are discussed in other portions of this NFP, and that ED need

not consider every conceivable alternative to the proposed priorities but rather must consider a reasonable range of alternatives that fosters informed decision making, which it has done here.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter raised concerns with the Department's authority for the priorities, requirements, and definitions. Specifically, the commenter argued that the ETAA does not give the Department the authority to establish a coordinating National Center or to establish the configuration of regional centers on a competition-by-competition basis; or to establish application requirements beyond those explicitly listed in the ETAA.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the feedback from the commenter but disagrees with these assertions. Section 9602(a)(1) of the ETAA requires that the Department operate no fewer than 20 centers total, and Section 9602(b)(1) requires only that "not less than 1 comprehensive center is established in each of the 10 geographic regions served by the regional educational laboratories established under section 941(h) of the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination, and Improvement Act of 1994." Section 9602(b)(2) further authorizes the Department, after meeting the requirements of 9602(b)(1), to establish additional centers, considering "the school-age population, proportion of economically disadvantaged students, the increased cost

burdens of service delivery in areas of sparse population, and the number of schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities and targeted support and improvement activities under section 1111(d) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [20 U.S.C. 6311(d)] in the population served by the local entity or consortium of such entities." This provides substantial flexibility to the Department to define regions based on these considerations, while also recognizing that these needs-based factors may change over time and subsequently, regional configurations may need to be adjusted to take these changes into account. Further, to the extent that there are commonly identified needs across these considerations, the Department has defined "the Nation" as the region served for the National Center and Content Centers. The Department notes that it has funded Content Centers or a National Center in each competition of this program since last authorized under the ETAA in 2002. The Department has operated a National Center since 2019 and has, in each competition cycle, conducted rulemaking to establish the regional configuration for Regional Centers. Regarding application requirements, Section 9602(c)(1) of the ETAA requires that applicants for grants under the CC program "shall submit an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such additional information as the Secretary may reasonably require." Given these statutory

authorizations, the Department believes that the priorities, requirements, and definitions are well within the authority of the ETAA.

Changes: None.

Comments: Multiple commenters opposed new priorities that may lead to a competition to replace existing grants and to establish new grants prior to the end of the current grant awards made in 2024. Many of these commenters highlighted a primary concern that a mid-cycle competition would interrupt the current work of CCs and cause a disruption to the progress of multi-year projects. Several comments noted that a majority of existing CCs had recently been reinstated after a period of termination and highlighted negative experiences that these interruptions had on State work. A few commenters focused on concerns related to disrupting ongoing Regional Centers projects; losing existing capacity provided by current Regional Centers, particularly for small, rural school divisions that rely upon their support; or slowing progress on State priorities if CC work is transitioned to new providers. A few commenters highlighted ongoing projects between specific Regional Centers and their clients that they were concerned would be disrupted by a new competition, including ongoing work with the Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Departments of Education on priority initiatives; the work of the Northeast Center, the work of the West Center; and

the work of the Appalachia Regional Center on career and technical education and workforce development initiatives. Other commenters also shared concerns related to a potential mid-cycle competition, including the potential negative impact on relationships between States and their Regional Centers should current awards be discontinued and an increased administrative burden on States and grantees if grants are terminated mid-cycle, which may result in States having to dedicate more time to engaging with potential applicants, navigating disruptions to currently scoped work, or onboarding and transitioning work to new grantees. A few commenters recommended the Department consider extending the current grants for two years at the end of the current five-year grant cycle to align with REL awards that would next be made in 2032. A few commenters recommended that, in lieu of running a competition and making new awards in 2026, the Department could make adjustments to existing cooperative agreements to embed new priorities and goals for the program into the work of current grantees.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the feedback from commenters regarding the benefits of continuing to fund existing CC projects and specific examples of concerns with possible disruption of work for State clients. The Department has not made a final decision regarding the timing of new CC projects, and whether such new CC projects

would necessitate a cessation of old CC project activity. However, if the Department were to make new CC awards within this fiscal year, an advantage would be the ability to align REL and CC funding cycles to achieve stronger program alignment and program efficiencies that support States and other clients in achieving improvements in student outcomes and building the necessary capacity to advance the Administration's priorities to return education to the States in the current funding year rather than waiting another year or years for the next potential funding cycle. In order to take advantage of this flexibility, the Department believes that finalizing these priorities, requirements, and definitions now is a significant and necessary step towards the Department's goals to improve the design of the CC program to better align to the statutory intent of the ETAA.

The Department also considered, as a countervailing factor, the potential for service gaps or other disruptions should a competition, award, and initiation of new grants occur within the current fiscal year. If the Department ultimately determines that existing project activities should be concluded, it will provide current grantees with a reasonable period to wind down their projects. In addition, the Department would require these grantees to coordinate with, and, as appropriate, transfer ongoing State level projects to the newly selected grantees to

minimize any interruption in services. This transition process would be consistent with the procedures the Department employed when winding down and transferring work from prior CC grantees in 2019 and 2024. The Department also evaluated the alternative of directing existing CC grantees to modify their cooperative agreements to implement the priorities, requirements, and definitions set forth in this action. However, as explained in the NPP, a central objective of this Administration is to return education decision-making authority to the States. To most effectively advance that objective, the Department may determine that conducting a competition under these priorities that provides preferences to entities to best reflect this focus is necessary. Therefore, while the Department may decide to end the current CC awards and run a grant competition to award new CC grants in FY 2026 or in subsequent fiscal years, we make no further changes based on these comments.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter discussed the connection of the priorities, requirements, and definitions to tribal interests, particularly related to tribal consultation and tribal sovereignty. The commenter argued that the Department should be required to complete Tribal Consultation prior to final rulemaking given the potential impact on services impacting tribal education.

Additionally, the commenter raised concerns that the focus on State Learning Agendas could infringe upon the sovereignty of tribes to establish education priorities. The commenter shared additional recommendations such as to require coordination with the National Congress of American Indians and the Bureau of Indian Education and to create a pathway for tribal educational agencies (TEAs) to access technical assistance services separate from the Regional Centers, such as through the National Center.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the comments, and we agree with the importance of upholding tribal sovereignty and supporting tribal education priorities through the CC program. The Department conducted extensive engagement related to the CC program in 2023, including Tribal Consultation (see transcript at https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2023/05/Jan-24.2023-Tribal-Consultation_transcript.pdf) and the feedback from that process informs these priorities, requirements, and definitions. The development of State Learning Agendas or State service plans does not compel adoption of these priorities by TEAs; centers will be expected, aligned with the requirements in the ETAA and these priorities, to ensure that services reflect the needs of the clients they are serving, including TEAs. Finally, the Department has emphasized the importance of coordination with relevant partners and agencies throughout the priorities and

requirements and does not believe that specific additions related to these comments are needed. We also emphasize that the Department believes, aligned with the requirements for service in the ETAA, the priorities allow for TEA clients to access services through multiple pathways similar to what is available for SEA clients, through direct work with the Regional Center in the region, through Content Centers focused on relevant topics, or through the National Center, where applicable. To emphasize this, the Department has added serving the needs of tribal students to the National Center priority to confirm the importance of services to this population.

Changes: The Department added language to the National Center priority to emphasize that services shall address national needs identified to address the unique educational obstacles faced by tribal students.

Comments: One commenter raised concerns that the priorities, requirements, and definitions could impose burdens on small States, TEAs, and rural communities by mandating participation in proposed CC program activities, such as developing State Learning Agendas; program intake processes; and participation in joint advisory boards. The commenter also recommended that the Department take steps to reduce barriers for participation in the CC program for small entities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Tribally Controlled Colleges and

Universities (TCCUs), other minority serving institutions (MSIs), and small businesses, including a specific suggestion to reserve funds or provide priority points for applications from these types of entities.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's feedback around the need to support small entities, including those who are clients of the program and those who may apply for funding. We clarify that, while we believe that these priorities, requirements, and definitions will improve the CC program to make participation beneficial to all clients, these actions do not compel any clients, including TEAs or small States, to participate, and that all clients would be able to weigh the benefits of participation in the program against any time and resource obligations such participation may require. To the extent that certain groups are identified to participate in CC Advisory Boards, the Department notes that the requirements for participation and input are statutory, while providing flexibility for Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) to appoint designees to participate on behalf of the CSSO, as well as to recommend appropriate representation from constituent groups and partners within their States who have the capacity to participate. By establishing joint rather than separate governing and advisory boards with RELs, the Department intends to significantly reduce the participation burden on regional

participants. Additionally, the Department disagrees with the suggestion to create a priority related to small businesses, HBCUs, TCCUs, or MSIs because we do not believe that it is necessary to advancing the statutory intent of this program under the ETAA or the Department's policy goals for this program, particularly related to returning education to the States. We therefore decline to establish a specific priority for small businesses, HBCUs, TCCUs, or MSIs in this program, though we welcome applications from these entities to the extent that they are eligible entities under Section 9602(b) of the ETAA.

Changes: None.

PRIORITIES

Priority 1: National Center

Comments: Multiple commenters provided feedback on the role of the National Center as outlined in Priority 1, specifically related to the degree to which the National Center should provide direct services to CC clients. Many commenters supported the National Center primarily serving in a coordinating role for the CCNetwork and RELs and several commenters suggested that the National Center should not provide direct services but instead serve only as a broker and coordinator of services, aligned to State-identified, rather than federally-identified needs. Another commenter recommended that the National Center's primary role should focus on leading coordination, escalation, and

quality-assurance across the CCNetwork, supporting cross-center alignment, addressing unresolved or cross-cutting issues, and providing States with a clear pathway to raise concerns around service provision.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the opportunity to clarify its intent that the National Center both implement *and* coordinate client-driven technical assistance. The Department appreciates commenters' recognition of the importance as a primary role of the National Center to coordinate services to both support client needs and the broader functioning of the CCNetwork. However, The Department disagrees that the National Center should not provide services. We believe the National Center must retain the ability to address multi-State needs that may arise throughout the course of a multi-year grant cycle that cannot be addressed by Regional Centers given their focus on region-specific support. The Department also recognizes that national needs may arise that cannot be addressed by Content Centers who are focused on specific topical areas. The Department believes that the National Center has an important role in addressing cross-State priorities, provided these needs are not already being addressed by another federal provider. However, we agree that these needs should be State-identified, rather than identified by the Department. For this reason, the Department amends the priority language for the National

Center to further clarify its role to provide cross-State targeted or universal services, when appropriate and grounded in demonstrated need, consistent with the statutory priorities and focus areas of this program, and as identified by analysis of high-leverage needs across State Learning Agendas, Regional Service Plans, its Advisory Board, or other data-based means of needs identification.

Changes: The Department amends Priority 1: National Center to clarify how its services should be focused to ensure that needs addressed are State-identified.

Comments: Many commenters supported the creation of a National Center concierge service, while several commenters emphasized the importance of clarifying the National Center's role in relation to the Regional Centers in identifying and selecting expertise through its cadre of national subject matter experts. Several commenters noted the concierge service strategy would promote better access to expertise and support through the CCNetwork.

Several commenters indicated concerns about the proposed concierge role as a single point of entry to CC services. Commenters noted the importance of Regional Centers' long-term, sustained relationships with States in understanding needs and context and shaping complex capacity-building projects. Commenters shared concerns with transitioning this primary contact role to the National

Center, including that the concierge role would add an unnecessary layer between States and Regional Centers, that the approach risks unintentionally limiting States' ability to strategically leverage available supports, that the National Center may avoid distributing requests to potential competitors, and that a centralized process may slow rather than expedite service intake and delivery timelines and delay needed services to State clients.

Several commenters recommended that States' primary relationships and entry points to the CCNetwork should continue to be driven through Regional Centers, but suggested that the National Center can serve as a helpful "clearinghouse", coordinating information sharing and learning, a coordinating hub to support coordination and connection across Centers where multi-provider engagement is needed, and to promote overall alignment and coherence of CCNetwork services.

A few commenters also suggested that the National Center serve as a "broker" to connect States and Centers with a broad registry of national subject matter experts with proven expertise and results supporting CC clients. One commenter suggested that such a registry should include client reviews and transparency in service pricing. One commenter proposed that the National Center should create a publicly accessible database of pre-qualified providers, and that it should be regularly updated based on evidence

of demonstrated effectiveness and State-reported satisfaction with services provided. One commenter recommended that the National Center directly contract services with the national cadre of experts on behalf of States.

Discussion: The Department appreciates commenters' thoughtful reflections and recommendations on how the National Center concierge service can best improve access to services and expertise and reduce burden for potential CC clients. The Department agrees that States should retain direct relationships with their Regional Centers who serve as their primary service providers and as discussed in the General Comments section, amended language to clarify the National Center's role as a facilitator and connector rather than a necessary entry point. The Department also notes that we have consistently received client feedback that they are not aware of all the Department-funded Centers and therefore do not always know how to direct requests or which Centers can support their needs. The Department intends not that the National Center serve as an obligatory starting point for those inquiries, but instead that the National Center concierge service can provide a voluntary point of entry for any State or other client seeking federal technical assistance on a particular issue or high-leverage problem. In this capacity, the National Center can make potential clients aware of their options

and facilitate access to available resources across the federal technical assistance ecosystem. To clarify this element, the Department amended the National Center priority language and Program Requirement 6 for the National Center to reflect the voluntary aspect of utilizing this service.

The Department disagrees that the National Center should directly contract work on behalf of States, and notes that individualized State support should still be directed through a State's Regional Center, with support from the National Center to identify options for qualified providers and subject matter experts that may meet State needs. The Department does agree, however, that the National Center should play a role in soliciting, vetting, and providing access to a broad range of subject matter experts and service providers with proven track records of providing high-quality, outcomes-based services that could be contracted by Centers, and that States should have choice in selecting subject matter experts they deem best qualified to meet their needs. The Department has further clarified this intention by amending the Program and Application Requirements for the National Center related to establishing a national cadre of subject matter experts to ensure that the cadre includes a broad range of expertise from providers with proven outcomes working with CC clients and sufficient information to help clients make informed

selections among potential providers. The Department agrees that this information should be made available to clients and include client reviews, examples of work, and transparency in pricing. The Department also notes the Program Requirement for Regional Centers to partner with clients on determining their needs for expertise and provide clients with transparent options, including via the national cadre of subject matter experts, with the intention that clients can select the expertise for each project best suited for their needs, including expertise beyond the immediate staff of the Center. We have amended the language of Program Requirement 3 for Regional Centers to reinforce the importance of client-driven selection.

Changes: The Department has amended Priority 1 and Program Requirement 6 for the National Center to reflect the voluntary aspect of the concierge service. The Department additionally amends Program and Application Requirements for the National Center related to the establishment of a national cadre of subject matter experts to specify that the cadre must include providers with proven results working with State clients to improve student outcomes. The Department also amended Program Requirement 3 for Regional Centers to incorporate language supporting client selection of providers and the Regional Centers' role to support evaluation of options.

Comments: One commenter noted the broad variation among

SEAs in size, funding, political context, and operational sophistication that produce varying levels of State agency capacity, resulting in each agency's need for differentiated support from CCs. The commenter suggested adding a requirement to this priority for the National Center to conduct and maintain biennial comprehensive capacity assessments of SEAs to assist Regional and Content Centers in developing differentiated support based on State capacities for strategic planning, evidence use, organizational learning, data infrastructure, and talent management dimensions.

Discussion: We appreciate the commenter's suggestions regarding how to address variations in State agency capacities and agree it would be appropriate for the National Center to create assessments to assist in identifying SEA needs related to specific dimensions of capacity, including strategic planning, evidence use, organizational learning, data infrastructure, and talent management. However, we believe these assessments would best be conducted voluntarily and led by Regional Centers in their direct engagement with States, rather than required and conducted by the National Center. Therefore, we have added language to the National Center priority and added a program requirement for the National Center related to developing tools and resources that will promote service delivery across the CCNetwork, which could include the

suggested capacity assessments.

Changes: The Department added language to Priority 1 to include developing tools and resources that support delivery of high-quality, high-impact technical assistance and capacity-building services across the CCNetwork, including capacity assessments. Additionally, the Department added a program requirement for the National Center aligned to the Priority 1 additions.

Comments: One commenter recommended adding a requirement to this priority for the National Center to identify common high-priority needs across States prior to soliciting applications for Regional Centers and Content Centers.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's suggestion that the National Center could play an important role in identifying common high priority needs that could be addressed by Regional or Content Centers and has added a program requirement related to this focus area for the National Center. The Department agrees that the National Center could draw these data from State Learning Agendas and other organizational assessments, as well as from analysis of REL and Regional Center annual plans. The Department disagrees that the National Center should be responsible for identifying priorities prior to the Department inviting applications for Regional Centers and Content Centers. We believe that the Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) required under Section 206 of the ETAA

are intended to serve this purpose, and that these are appropriate vehicles, among others, to identify priorities for the program according to current statutory intent. The Secretary established 10 RACs in 2023 to conduct an education needs assessment and identify each region's most critical educational needs and develop recommendations for technical assistance to meet those needs, and the priorities and needs identified through this process informed the priorities, requirements, and definitions in this notice¹.

Changes: The Department added a Program Requirement for the National Center to conduct and publish an annual synthesis of common high-priority needs across States to inform and enable cross-regional peer learning on shared challenges and targeted and universal support needs from Content Centers, or other Centers, as needed.

Comments: One commenter suggested that the National Center advisory board should be comprised primarily of current CSSOs and should include representation from the leadership of national representative organizations to increase accountability and ensure the National Center's services are focused on State priorities.

Discussion: The Department generally agrees with the commenters' recommendations, and notes that the Department

¹ Final RAC reports were published in December 2023 on the Department's website at <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/regional-advisory-committees>.

currently requires National Center Advisory Board membership from national organizations representing CSSOs, chief executive officers (e.g. governors), Regional Centers and other organizations with expertise relevant to the goals of the project. The Department notes that membership requirements for the National Center Advisory Board have typically been addressed through cooperative agreements issued after grant awards are made. The Department also agrees with the importance of the Advisory Board in helping the Center to identify common issues that should be addressed by the National Center in its annual service plan and adds language to this priority to clarify that services shall address national needs identified by the Center's Advisory Board.

Changes: The Department has added language to the priority to ensure services address needs identified by the Center's Advisory Board.

Comments: One commenter recommended enhancements to this priority to ensure that the National Center intentionally and effectively serves rural students through service plans that reflect rural needs, embeds rural expertise in its personnel, expands outreach to rural partners and supports cross-agency coordination that aligns education, workforce, health, and community services.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's suggestions and agrees that serving the needs of rural

students is an important focus area of this program. The Department notes that serving rural populations has been an area of focus in previous competitions and would be an appropriate use of National Center resources. The Department also notes that in any competition where the Field-Initiated or Emerging Needs priorities are used for Content Centers, applicants may propose Content Centers focused on the unique needs of rural students, in which case the National Center should not duplicate those services. Therefore, the Department proposes amending the language of the priority to note the importance of support for rural students, while also noting the imperative to ensure services do not duplicate those provided by other federal Centers.

Changes: The Department added language to the National Center priority to emphasize that services shall address national needs identified to address the unique educational obstacles faced by rural students.

Priority 2: Regional Centers

Comments: Many commenters provided feedback on Priority 2: Regional Centers and the Directed Question regarding the optimal configuration of Regional Centers. A few of these commenters emphasized that the ideal regional configuration should ensure Centers understand the local context of the States they serve and have sufficient capacity relative to the number of States served to develop deep, long-term

relationships with clients.

Commenters discussed the optimal number of states served by each Regional Center, ranging from 1-2 States up to all States in a given REL region. A few commenters noted that serving large geographic areas can add complexity to service delivery or prove difficult to manage for Regional Centers. A few commenters highlighted the value of smaller or moderately sized regions, noting that such arrangements allow for stronger relationships, stronger multi-year collaboration, rapid-response support, and meaningful peer-to-peer learning among states. One commenter noted that previous models, with more regions, provided more balanced support and recommended a more flexible or expanded regional structure. Another commenter cautioned that close alignment to REL regions could give longtime REL operators an unfair competitive edge in applying for Regional Center grants.

One commenter recommended serving States through a hybrid model of a smaller number of Regional Centers along with 8-10 national thematic Content Centers to offer States both regional relationships and deep national expertise.

Overall, commenters stress that alignment should balance operational efficiencies with State needs for differentiated and intensive supports.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the thoughtful feedback from commenters on Priority 2 and the Directed

Question regarding the optimal configuration of Regional Centers that best supports clients while meeting the requirements of the ETAA. The Department agrees that retaining a regional configuration that aligns with and does not cross boundaries with the established REL regions is beneficial to effective coordination and clear lines of support for States. We disagree with commenters that suggest regions should not be bound by REL region boundaries and would point to commenters who spoke to challenges in operation, coordination, and partnerships during prior cycles in which regional boundaries crossed multiple RELs.

The Department additionally appreciates commenter suggestions on how the Department might determine additional regions, based on need, State size or capacity, or other factors. The Department has designed Priority 2 to allow the Department flexibility to establish the regional configuration for each competition, in compliance with the requirements in Section 9602(a)(2) of the ETAA. We also emphasize the factors from the ETAA that the Department will consider to determine the configuration of Regional Centers for any given competition, including the school-age population, proportion of economically disadvantaged students, the increased cost burdens of service delivery in areas of sparse population, and the number of schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement

activities and targeted support and improvement activities under section 1111(d) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in the population served by the local entity or consortium of such entities.

The Department does not believe that specific changes to Priority 2 are needed given this flexibility, but we will consider feedback from commenters in determining the regional configuration, along with these statutory factors, in subsequent competitions where this priority is used.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter expressed concern about potential alignment of Regional Centers with existing REL regions, expressing that one-to-one alignment may disadvantage smaller States, and recommended the Department adopt a differentiated regional structure to ensure equitable access to services nationwide and avoid administrative or structural changes that could inadvertently reduce responsiveness or effectiveness of Regional Centers. This commenter urged the Department to avoid strict alignment with REL regions, to increase the number of Regional Centers, and incorporate features that ensure smaller States receive an equitable share of resources and support from Regional Centers. The commenter additionally recommended that the Department prioritize State-driven service models, to ensure all States have access to intensive, customized support and to better position the

program to achieve its goals of improving outcomes, closing achievement gaps, and strengthening educational systems nationwide and ensure equitable access to services and funding by incorporating safeguards that prevent larger States from disproportionately consuming regional resources.

Discussion: The Department appreciates this comment and agrees with the importance of ensuring sufficient resources and differentiation to States, and particularly to smaller States or States with unique needs. The Department appreciates the commenters' input on the potential impacts of strict alignment to existing REL regions, as well as the challenges of providing equal support to large and small States alike in the same regions. The Department notes that Section 9602(b)(1) of the ETAA requires only that at "not less than 1 comprehensive center is established in each of the 10 geographic regions served" by the RELs, which implies that some Regional alignment is needed. However, Section 9602(b)(2) further authorizes the Department to, after meeting the requirements of 9602(b)(1), to establish additional centers, considering factors related State contexts, needs, and capacities. The Department also notes that it has established, in competitions, minimum funding levels for Regional Centers to ensure that all Regional Centers have sufficient resources to operate according to regional needs, including needs related to economically

disadvantaged students, student attending schools identified for improvement, or needs associated with areas of sparse population or large geographic service areas.

Finally, we note that Section 9602(d) requires that “(e)ach comprehensive center established under this section shall allocate such center's resources to and within each State in a manner which reflects the need for assistance” based on multiple factors which ensure that all States within a region receive adequate support regardless of the State population or size, and potentially advantage smaller States with more acute needs for assistance. The Department maintains alignment to statutory requirements for service provision in section 9602(f) of the ETAA across Priority 1, Priority 2, and Priority 3, as well as Program Requirement 1 for All Centers, which requires that all Centers’ service plans must demonstrate how services will prioritize support for students and communities with the highest needs, as described in section 9602(e) of the ETAA. We believe this combination of statutory and regulatory requirements provides the necessary flexibility to consider the needs of smaller States in regional configurations and provides existing leverage for differentiation to ensure each State receives equitable, tailored, and sustained capacity-building support.

Changes: None.

Comments: Several commenters urged the Department to make

supporting SEA and LEA school improvement capacity an explicit priority for Regional Centers.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' suggestion and notes that Priority 2 reinforces the focus on the statutory intent of the program described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA to address the unique educational challenges, and improve the outcomes, of schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities or targeted or additional targeted support and improvement activities under title I, part A of the ESEA (ESEA sec. 1111(d)). The Department also reinforces this statutory emphasis in Program Requirement 1 for All Centers which requires that service plans must demonstrate how services will prioritize support for students and communities with the highest needs, as described in section 203(e) of the ETAA, which requires Centers to give priority to schools in the region that have been identified for school improvement under section 1116(b) of the ESEA. We believe the current priority and requirement sufficiently address the statutory focus of the program on school improvement and that no additional changes are needed.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter recommended that Regional Centers should conduct baseline capacity assessments of the States they serve, and then differentiate support based on SEA capacity, with suggested tiers for high, middle, and

emerging capacity, to promote intensive organizational development across states. This commenter also recommended that Regional Centers establish structured mentorship programs between States, and allow explicit use of intermediate capacity indicators, including, for example, adoption and regular use of SEA organizational learning and improvement processes, gains in evidence-based decision-making, and evidence of skill building in transformation-related topics, among others. The commenter suggests that these indicators could be compared against a known standard that aligns to expectations for State leadership, and that expected changes in State capacity should be specified in annual service plans alongside outcomes related to improvements in student outcomes.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the suggestion to support differentiated support based on SEA capacity under Priority 2: Regional Centers and agrees in the importance of setting explicit goals for building State capacity and demonstrating that capacity is being built through measuring and reporting on intermediate capacity measures. In the Application Requirements for Regional Centers, applicants must describe how they intend to “measure the readiness of clients and recipients to work with the Center; co-design projects and define outcomes; measure and monitor client and recipient capacity across the four dimensions of capacity-building; and measure the outcomes

achieved throughout and at the conclusion of a project.”

The *Definitions* section of this notice includes explanations of the four dimensions of capacity-building for this program that form the basis for Centers’ work with clients. The Department believes these dimensions generally and adequately capture the types of organizational capacity the commenter describes. The Department also notes that Program Requirement 1 requires Centers to define capacity-building outcomes related to their work with each client, including short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes, in their annual service plans. These outcomes, as included in the *Definitions* section of this notice, must describe the “demonstrable effects of receiving capacity-building services and must reflect the result of capacity built in at least one of the four dimensions of capacity building.”

The Department amends Program Requirement 2 to ensure services are designed with clients to address specific client needs and desired outcomes. The Department agrees on the importance of having available capacity assessments that would assist Centers in assessing, tracking and reporting State capacity indicators, and in having standards of State capacity against which States might identify opportunities to focus development and improvement. However, the Department declines to require use of specific indicators at this time, as we believe applicants may each propose effective strategies to measure

"readiness", and that standards would be best developed in collaboration with Centers and their clients after award. The Department believes this is an appropriate role for the National Center to compile examples of capacity assessments and develop common tools and resources to align capacity assessment, tracking, and reporting across Centers and, as discussed in a prior discussion and changes section, have added language to Priority 1 and the Program Requirements to add the responsibility. We do not believe that further changes are needed.

Changes: We amended Program Requirement 2 to require that services are designed to address specific client needs and desired outcomes.

Comments: One commenter raised concerns related to the work of centers around supporting clients to address corrective actions related to audit findings or the Department's ESEA program monitoring and if that work may undermine the collaborative relationship between CCs and States.

Discussion: We appreciate the commenter's concern related to how potential CC work to support clients in addressing corrective actions may impact CC-client relationships. We note that States are not required to work with Centers to address corrective actions or results from audit findings and ESEA program monitoring conducted by the Department, but may do so at the State's request, and do not believe this type of work undermines the collaborative relationship

of the Regional Center with the State but rather elevates specific technical assistance needs identified by the Department and provides a free and cost-effective support to remedy Department monitoring findings or corrective actions where building state capacity is needed. Because State engagement around corrective actions would be voluntary and at a State's request, and this notice neither requires nor prohibits this engagement, we do not believe changes are needed.

Changes: None

Priority 3: Content Centers

Comments: Several commenters shared general concerns with Priority 3: Content Centers, particularly related to the Emerging Needs and Field-Initiated Content Centers.

Specifically, a few commenters noted concerns that the inclusion of Content Centers could decrease resources available for Regional Centers or decrease coherence across the program. One commenter shared concerns that past iterations of Content Centers had not been effective and had negatively constrained research in their relevant fields, and another commenter noted that the focus on Emerging Needs Centers with Department-identified topics appeared contrary to the focus on State-driven needs.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the perspectives shared by commenters. We note that the priorities do not indicate funding levels and that, based on Congressional

appropriations, the Department will determine and publish funding levels for Regional and Content Centers in an Application Notice and Instructions (ANI) for a specific competition. In setting funding levels, the Department considers the factors identified in Section 9602(a)(2)(B) as well as any expected minimum funding levels needed to provide services and maintain the Center. Further, the Department believes that Priority 3 establishes strong expectations for the performance of the Centers and their alignment to statutory requirements of the ETAA, State needs and coordination with other CCs and Department TA providers. We do not believe changes to the priorities or specific focus areas are needed.

Changes: None.

Comments: A few commenters strongly recommended that the Department maintain the Content Center on English Learners and Multilingualism and expressed support for the expertise provided by the Center during the current grant cycle. In addition, a few commenters expressed their support to preserve the current Content Center for Early Learning Success and the focus within the CC program on the continuum of PK-3, emphasizing the critical importance of strengthening early learning, addressing persistent national challenges in early literacy and math and minimizing disruptions to current work plans.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters'

perspectives. The CC program aims to improve educational outcomes, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction for all students, particularly those with the greatest need. Section 9602(f) of the ETAA requires that the CCs include technical assistance activities focused on supporting English language acquisition. As such, the Department believes that, according to the needs of local school, district, and State clients of the CC program, supporting the needs of English learners in English language acquisition will continue to be a focus area of the CC program. Additionally, related to early learning, the Department believes that, based on the needs of clients such as States, LEAs, and schools, supporting early learning will remain a significant area of focus for the program. Therefore, we do not believe that it is necessary for the Department to dictate either of these as a required topic for a dedicated content center. We emphasize that the Department could, in a future competition cycle and based on the evolving needs of CC clients, identify these as topic areas for Emerging Needs content centers. Additionally, we note that applicants can, under the Field-Initiated topic area under Priority 3: Content Centers, propose centers that focus on a specific topic on national need, as emphasized by the demonstrated needs of States, districts, and other CC clients.

Changes: None.

Comments: Several commenters provided feedback on the potential focus areas for Emerging Needs Centers under Priority 3: Content Centers. One of these commenters discussed the importance of Emerging Needs Centers being relevant across States and recommended that, in any competition using this focus area, the Department share a clear explanation of how the focus of the Emerging Needs Centers were determined and how they reflect input from stakeholders across States and regions. Several commenters provided suggestions for potential specific focus areas of Emerging Needs Centers aligned to the current Secretary's Supplemental Priorities, including literacy acceleration and achievement, numeracy acceleration and achievement, advancing artificial intelligence in education, civics education, school choice, and career pathways and workforce readiness or career and technical education. Another commenter cautioned that focus areas for Emerging Needs Centers should be grounded in clear areas of need, such as school improvement and literacy, where there is evidence of gaps in State capacity rather than setting content areas to align primarily with Administration priorities. The commenter shared concern about potential alignment between Emerging Needs center topic areas and the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities on Returning Education to the States; Expanding Education Choice; and Promoting Patriotic Education. One commenter suggested additional potential

focus areas including school finance, open education resources, and effective communication and engagement strategies. Other commenters suggested Emerging Needs should focus on building SEA capacity, including, for example, organizational development, strategic planning, evidence-use infrastructure, and data and research infrastructure, to support State agencies in building their internal capacity for solution-building and evidence use. Another commenter suggested potential focus areas for Emerging Needs Centers related to national security and STEM industry workforce needs, such as those in the defense industrial base, in semiconductor production, or those addressing National Security Education Program-designated critical language instruction areas. This commenter also recommended evaluating proposals for Emerging Needs centers against Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act priorities, Perkins State plans and workforce security goals.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' suggestions related to Emerging Needs centers. We agree that these centers must be grounded in areas of shared need across States and believe that is sufficiently emphasized in the priority through the language noting that centers established under this priority will focus on an "education topic of significant national or regional need." Because this focus area under Priority 3 is currently written to

provide flexibility for the Department to define topics for Emerging Needs centers in any given competition, we do not believe changes to the priority are necessary to reflect the specific topical feedback from commenters. The Department reiterates as stated in the priority that we will establish the specific topic area or areas for Emerging Needs Centers that are "aligned to the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities, areas of need identified in the Regional Advisory Committee reports, the technical assistance topics identified in the ETAA, or other critical aspects of need related to quality implementation of programs under the ESEA" in a ANI for any future grant competition, and therefore decline to propose specific topical focus areas in this priority.

Changes: None.

Comments: Several commenters provided feedback on the focus area for Field-Initiated Centers under Priority 3: Content Centers. Overall, commenters supported the shift toward field-initiated centers, noting that this approach allows for a more targeted, sustained technical assistance response to emerging State and regional needs. One commenter recommended strengthening this approach by identifying specific topics areas for field-initiated applications, such as strategic school staffing, skill validation and competency aligned pathways, and the educator workforce. A few commenters suggested ensuring

field-initiated centers align to State-identified needs and that applicants demonstrate engagement with multi-region stakeholders to validate any proposed topic for a Center. One commenter suggested establishing a threshold or minimum number of States or Regions supporting the proposal for consideration as a Field-Initiated topic. Another commenter emphasized the importance of incorporating mechanisms for ongoing feedback from States and partners to continuously refine and guide the work of Field-Initiated Centers. One commenter recommended clarifying priority topics for Content Centers to be identified and updated based on emerging evidence and field needs.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' suggestions related to Focus Area 1: Field-Initiated Centers. Because this focus area under Priority 3 is currently written to provide flexibility for education topics of significant national or regional need that are aligned to the statutory purposes described in section 9602(f)(1) of the ETAA, we do not believe specific topics need to be identified in the priority; however we amend the application requirements for Content Centers to require applicants to describe how their proposed topic is aligned to the statutory program purposes. We appreciate commenters' suggestions to define what may constitute a significant need and add language to the priority to require evidence that the need must be "national" or

identified as a need in more than one region to support its identification as a topic of significant national or regional need. As outlined in the priority, educational topics for Field-Initiated Centers may include an array of topics based on State and regional needs and priorities, State learning agendas or another similar identification set forth by SEAs, REAs, TEAs or LEAs. With all proposed priorities, the Department acknowledges the importance of ensuring the relevance, responsiveness, and stakeholder's input to ensure Centers remain aligned to clients' needs.

Changes: The Department adds language to the priority to clarify how applicants may identify topics of national or regional significance. The Department additionally adds language to Application Requirement 3 for Content Centers to require applicants to identify how the proposed project aligns to statutory purposes in Section 9602(f)(1) of the ETAA and provide data to support the national or regional significance of the project.

Comments: One commenter supported the focus on principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, other school leaders, and specialized instructional support personnel in the focus area for the National Comprehensive Center for Improving Literacy for Students with Disabilities (NCIL), under Priority 3: Content Centers. The commenter recommended that the Department reinforce this focus on educators in the Emerging Needs and Field-Initiated focus areas as well by

adding a definition for "educator workforce" inclusive of teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, other school leaders, and specialized instructional support personnel, and amending the priority language for these focus areas to make reference to this definition of the educator workforce to ensure that all individuals in these specific roles in schools are included.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's support for the importance of a definition of "educator workforce" that focuses on a broad range of professionals, and we agree that further clarity would be helpful to better define the types of educators and practitioners that the Department envisions would benefit from services. Specifically, the Department notes its definition of *educator* for this program established in the 2024 NFP, which means "an individual who is a teacher (including an early education teacher), principal or other school leader, administrator, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, school social worker, librarian, early intervention service personnel), paraprofessional, faculty, and others," clarifies the intention of this program to support educators across a range of roles and will include this term in the *Definitions* section for greater clarity. However, we disagree that Priority 3 should be amended to include the term "educator workforce" as a specific topical focus area

because the flexibility to address this topic already exists in the Priority.

Changes: The Department has included the definition of *educator* established in the 2024 NFP in the *Definitions* section of this notice for greater clarity.

Comments: Several commenters supported the proposed focus area for the NCIL under Priority 3: Content Centers and also provided feedback on the activities and scope of center. One commenter recommended strengthening requirements related to access to education materials, assistive technology (AT), and training opportunities for students, families, and educators. Additionally, the commenter emphasized the importance of supporting literacy instruction for students who use augmented and alternative communication (AAC), American sign language (ASL), and braille, to more effectively support students with diverse learning needs. One commenter suggested that the Center should focus on essential technical assistance and support in States and local jurisdictions, to improve the literacy skills development for students, including those with disabilities. The commenter also emphasized that the proposed center should assist States and districts to understand the flexibility and allowable uses of general and special education funding. Another commenter suggested that the Center should serve all SEAs and LEAs, including charter schools that operate as their own LEAs, and

proposed changes to add additional requirements for the NCIL to be more specific regarding the creation of evidence based universal screeners and the components of these tools.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters' support for the NCIL and the perspectives from commenters on topics such as the importance of AT in meeting the individual needs of students and supporting their learning. The Center is dedicated to advancing evidence-based teaching methods for pre-K through grade 12 students with literacy-related disabilities, including dyslexia. The language of this focus area under Priority 3 reflects the authorizing language for this Center in ESEA, and therefore the Department declines to revise the priority text in order to remain closely aligned to the statutory intent for this Center. However, related to supporting effective use of AT, the Department affirms that, as noted under part (b) of this Focus Area, a grantee may develop products and services that better support educators, families, and students in the effective use of AT. Given the population of students served under the NCIL, as defined in statute as students at risk of not attaining full literacy skills due to a disability, including dyslexia impacting reading or writing, or developmental delay impacting reading, writing, language processing, comprehension, or executive functioning, the Center is expected to be responsive to

these needs, including serving students who use AAC, ASL, and braille. In addition, the Department funds a Center on Technology Systems that provides technical assistance to LEAs to support the implementation of comprehensive and sustainable assistive and instructional technology systems. The Center funded under this priority may, as needed based on client input, collaborate with other centers to ensure access to specialized expertise and avoid duplication of efforts across the Department's technical assistance landscape.

The recommendation to support States and districts in understanding the flexible and allowable uses of general and special education funding falls outside of the statutory responsibilities of the Center and therefore we decline to make edits to the priority to incorporate this as a focus area. The Department clarifies that the center serves SEAs, and LEAs, and charter schools operating as LEAs as outlined in the ESEA Section 8101(30) and does not believe that changes are needed because these types of charter schools are already included as potential clients.

Related to the screener tools, the Department believes it is aligned with the statutory authorization for this center to allow the focus on developing screening assessments and tools to be broad, as long as such tools and assessments are evidence-based and therefore declines to make revisions to the priority related to this topic.

Changes: None

REQUIREMENTS

Program Requirements

Comments: Many commenters expressed opposition to the proposed restricted indirect cost rate, which would reduce the amount of grant funds going to supporting program overhead. One commenter argued that it is not legally permissible for the Department to impose this as a program requirement in this circumstance. Many commenters believed that the addition of this requirement would disadvantage smaller nonprofits and university-based centers, limit the pool of high-quality applicants, and slow implementation. One commenter noted that caps such as an 8 percent limit would prevent applicants from recovering actual costs, create inequitable barriers, and conflict with the program's goals of providing high-quality, State-responsive technical assistance. Commenters also emphasized practical concerns, including rate-approval backlogs at cognizant agencies and administrative burden associated with negotiating rates—and urged the Department to instead rely on each applicant's existing negotiated indirect cost rate, to the extent existing applicants had one. Many commenters recommended that the Department remove the restricted indirect cost rate requirement entirely to preserve competition and program effectiveness.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenters

feedback regarding the use of a restricted indirect cost rate for this program. To begin, the Department notes that indirect cost rates for all of its grant and cooperative agreement programs are established through regulations issued via notice and comment rulemaking, including program specific regulations such as those proposed in the NPP. Accordingly, commenters' assertions that the Department is prohibited from setting an appropriate indirect cost rate for a program through rulemaking are incorrect. We appreciate the opportunity to clarify how restricted indirect cost rate requirements work. For example, restricted indirect cost rates may exceed eight percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC) under 34 CFR 75.564. The difference between restricted and unrestricted rates is not a fixed percentage; rather, it depends on which organizational expenses are permitted in the underlying calculation. As a result, grantees using a restricted rate may still recover general management costs, as permitted under 34 CFR 76.565. The primary general administrative costs excluded from a restricted indirect cost rate are expenditures related to governing bodies, salaries of chief executive officers, and reimbursing organizational components that are unrelated to the specific work of the grant or pertain solely to the office of the organization's chief executive (see 34 CFR 76.565(c)), which we believe would be appropriate restrictions for this program. The

Department agrees that grantees without an approved restricted indirect cost rate would need to obtain one in order to recover indirect costs. However, the Department disagrees that these existing grantees or applicants would be disadvantaged. Grantees and applicants are generally permitted to recover indirect costs from either the date they submit their initial request or back to the start of the project period for the grant (see 34 CFR 75.560(e)(3)). Moreover, any applicant without a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with the Federal Government is already in the position of needing to negotiate one unless the applicant elects to use the *de minimis* rate permitted under 2 CFR 200.414(f). In other words, to the extent there is any disadvantage, it would only place current CC grantees in the same position as organizations that apply for the CC competition that lack a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement.

However, the Department acknowledges some commenters' suggestions that, given the burdens and expenses associated with operating CCs, maintaining the unrestricted indirect cost rate would best support effective program implementation. Particularly, comments suggesting that adopting a restricted indirect cost rate may unfairly limit the range of eligible applicants who would be interested in applying to the program, and may in fact exclude some new applicants that the Department may want to encourage to

participate, suggest that adopting a restricted rate may result in undesirable impacts on a future competition. The Department finds these arguments regarding the nature and operation of the CC program persuasive at this time. As such, given these concerns, the Department is removing the requirement applying the restricted indirect rate from this notice. The Department remains interested in management approaches that will maximize the use of grant funds for direct program services while allowing flexibility to account for differences in applicant context and cost structure and will consider regulatory and non-regulatory alternative approaches in the future.

Changes: The Department removes the program requirement that all Centers be subject to, and all subgrantees subject to, a negotiated restricted indirect cost rate.

Comments: One commenter recommended that the program requirement for the National Center cadre of subject matter experts should include speech and language professionals, including speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's suggestion and agrees that speech and language professionals would be appropriate professionals to include in the national subject matter expert cadre. The Department notes that this program requirement includes that the National Center recruit and retain an expansive and comprehensive cadre of national subject matter experts that

includes qualified education practitioners, researchers, policy professionals, and other implementation consultants. We decline the recommendation to add these specific professions, as we believe the current program requirement does not restrict the inclusion of speech and language professionals. We additionally note that there are a wide range of specializations that would likely be beneficial to support State and local needs for support, and that the language of the program requirement is intended to be broad so as to include any types of professionals who may be needed to assist CC clients with needs aligned to this program's statutory purpose.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter requested clarification on how CC Advisory and REL Governing Boards would function under the proposed structure, specifically whether existing REL Governing Boards would satisfy the requirements for CC Advisory Boards or if new boards would be required.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the opportunity to clarify the intent behind the program requirement for Regional Centers to establish joint advisory boards with the REL serving their region. The Department proposes the establishment of jointly constructed boards that meet requirements under both ESRA Sec. 174 (h) (20 USC 9564) and ETAA Sec. 203 (g) (20 USC 9602), with both RELs and CCs contributing to their composition and operation. The

Department intends that participation on joint boards would reduce burden and make most efficient use of time for State agencies and other member categories that are duplicative across the REL and CC program requirements. Additionally, we believe that joint advisory boards will promote more strategic use of program resources, improved service delivery and coordination of REL and CCs, and greater clarity in the distinct roles of RELs and CCs to support regional priorities. Both RELs and CCs would be expected to share in the costs associated with operating these jointly constructed boards. The Department notes that REL and CCs regularly constitute new boards in each funding cycle and would be expected to jointly constitute new boards in the next funding cycle.

Changes: None.

Comments: A few commenters raised concerns about the proposed FTE requirements for Project Directors, noting that high director FTE levels could reduce resources available for technical assistance, create challenges for smaller centers with limited budgets, and restrict flexibility in staffing models. One commenter suggested that it may be important and beneficial for Project Directors to have time available to participate in other research and evidence-building activities to remain abreast of the latest trends and best practices in the field. A few commenters recommended lowering the minimum FTE

requirements for Project Directors of Regional and Content Centers from 0.75 to 0.50 FTE to better allow for shared Co-Director structures. One commenter suggested aligning the National Center's FTE expectations with those of Regional and Content Centers from collective 1.5 FTE to 1.0 FTE to promote consistency across the program. One commenter suggested the Department could encourage clear delineation of responsibilities between the Director and Co-Director, succession planning, and sufficient administrative support for grant operations.

Discussion: We appreciate commenters' input on appropriate FTE requirements for Center leadership. We believe the FTE requirements for both the National Center and Regional Centers are reasonable as the proposed structure provides flexible staffing options while ensuring sufficient leadership capacity required for the depth and intensity of the work. The Department declines to changes these requirements.

However, specifically for Content Centers, we do agree with the commenters that there may be valuable reasons for Project Directors to dedicate a portion of their time engaged in related research and work that supports their ability to serve effectively in their roles as national experts. We also agree that the FTE requirement for Content Centers should be reduced to ensure Centers have sufficient resources for service provision. Therefore, to allow for

greater flexibility in the allocation of resources for Content Centers, we have amended the Program Requirement 4 for Content Centers to reduce the minimum FTE levels for project leadership.

With the updates to the minimum levels for Content Centers, we believe the flexibility for all Centers to distribute FTE across a leadership team below the individual FTE requirement accommodates any Director to participate in activities outside the CCNetwork while maintaining an appropriate level of leadership dedicated to the project,; however, the Department believes it is important for applicants to further explain how they are allocating their leadership capacity across roles (e.g. Director, Co-Director, or Deputies) to meet program needs. Therefore, we are adding an application requirement for all applicants to specify their proposed leadership structure and describe how their organizational leadership will effectively manage the project according to the needs of the program.

Changes: We have amended the program requirement for Content Center to reduce the required minimum FTE for a Content Center Project Director from 0.75 FTE to 0.50 FTE, or, when more than one Project Director is proposed, the cumulative total must meet or exceed 0.75 FTE collectively. In addition, we have added an application requirement for all centers directing applicants to describe their

leadership structure and organizational capacity to assess, manage, and strategically utilize program resources.

Comments: One commenter recommended that the Department make State feedback mechanisms explicit and embed continuous feedback loops into program design to support ongoing service refinement. The commenter also urged the Department to provide grantees with timely CC performance data to enable real-time adjustment and improvements in program implementation.

Discussion: We agree that developing and implementing an effective performance management system that integrates client feedback and continuous improvement is an essential component of effective program implementation. Accordingly, the Department will retain the FY 2024 Program Requirement for All Centers to "Develop and implement an effective performance management system that integrates continuous improvement to promote effective achievement of client outcomes. The system must include methods to measure and monitor progress towards agreed upon outcomes, outputs, and milestones and to measure the reach, use, and impact of the services being delivered to ensure capacity-building services are implemented as intended, reaching intended clients and recipients, and achieving desired results. Progress monitoring must include periodic assessment of client satisfaction and timely identification of changes in State contexts that may impact the project's success. The

performance management system must include strategies to report on defined program performance measures.” Retaining this requirement ensures that Centers have the structures needed to maintain accountability, support continuous improvement, and advance the achievement of meaningful client outcomes.

Changes: The Department is adding the performance management system program requirement from the 2024 NFP to the Program Requirements for All Centers.

Comments: One commenter shared feedback on ways in which the program could present risks to national security given the potential for involvement of adversary nation individuals in the program as subject matter experts or partners or through exposure of program data or products to adversary nation audiences. The commenter also raised concerns with other ways in which the program may be vulnerable to financial or administrative risk, such as through fraud or anticompetitive behavior. The commenter suggested several program requirements for additional coordination or oversight activities related to national and financial security concerns, such as coordination activities with additional government agencies for centers conducting work related to STEM or manufacturing or other industries with national security connections; required briefings with government agencies on topics of national and financial security, such as related to fraud prevention

or screening partners for foreign influence; and required safeguards related to the development and dissemination of any curriculum products developed through the CC program.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's perspective on ensuring the security of the CC program. The Department conducts routine risk evaluations of applicants before award, and of grantees over the course of the grant period, as well as ongoing monitoring of and communication with grantees regarding risk, compliance, and performance, aligned with the Guidance for Federal Financial Assistance in 2 CFR part 200, as adopted and amended as regulations of ED in 2 CFR part 3474, and the Education Department General Administrative Regulations in 34 CFR part 75. We believe these processes are sufficient to address the potential risks relevant to this program and decline to introduce additional program requirements. Additionally, the Department clarifies that the CC program, through these priorities, requirements, and definitions, does not develop, require, nor endorse any particular curriculum, program, or intervention. Furthermore, under the Department of Education Organization Act, the Secretary is not authorized to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, or program of instruction at any school or institution of higher education (see 20 U.S.C. 3403). The priorities, requirements, and definitions in the document further the purpose of the CC program to

support State and local educational systems to implement activities described in the ESEA to improve academic opportunities and outcomes for students.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter recommended that the Department impose additional requirements to ensure products and services are 508-compliant, accessible to educators with disabilities, and aligned to other industry standards for accessibility identified by the commenter. Additionally, the commenter recommended that the Department implement additional requirements mandating CCs are compliant with privacy and security laws such as Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Privacy Act of 1974.

Discussion: We note that projects funded through discretionary grants using these priorities must already be consistent with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, where applicable, as well as requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and civil rights and other laws, where applicable, and does not believe that changes are necessary. Therefore, the Department declines to add accessibility or privacy requirements to these priorities because they would be duplicative of existing law.

Changes: None.

Application Requirements

Comments: One commenter suggested that the Department set a firm maximum limit on the number of pages that could be submitted as part of an application narrative under this program in order to provide clear expectations for potential applicants around the level of detail that is needed for an application to be considered competitive.

Discussion: We appreciate the commenter's feedback. The Department establishes any page limits on the application narrative, if applicable, in the ANI for a given competition. We believe it is appropriate to maintain the flexibility to establish any maximums or recommended maximums for each competition and therefore decline to identify a specific maximum or recommendation in the application requirements in this NFP.

Changes: None.

DEFINITIONS

Comments: One commenter identified a need for clarity on who the Department considered to be primary clients of the CC program. The commenter expressed concern related to the potential inclusion of students, families, REAs, and LEAs as primary clients of CC services, noting that these entities may be the ultimate beneficiaries of services but that they are best served through plans developed with SEAs and TEAs as primary clients.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's feedback. The Department clarifies that the priorities and

requirements incorporate a definition of "client" that was established in the 2024 NFP and that focuses on the "organization with which the Center enters into agreement for negotiated capacity-building services." This definition was established to align to Section 9602(e) of the ETAA, which notes that each CC "shall work with State educational agencies, local educational agencies, regional educational agencies, and schools in the region where such center is located..." on school improvement activities. The Department further clarifies that families are included as primary clients of the NCIL, based on the statutory focus on families for that center, and that students are not included in the definition of clients for any center, though both students and families may be beneficiaries of any CC services. The Department agrees with the commenter on the importance of SEA and TEA coordination to ensure coherence across CC services. We believe this focus is supported both by the requirements in the ETAA for State service plans under 9602(c)(2) and for coordination and collaboration under 9602(f)(2), as well as through the emphasis on coordination throughout the priorities, requirements, and definitions. However, we believe it is aligned with statutory intent to allow the definition of clients to be open to the other types of organizations identified in the ETAA.

Changes: None.

Comments: One commenter noted concern with the use of the term "evidence" in Program Requirement #1 for all centers, in the context of the requirement for centers to provide evidence that services reflect State-identified needs. The commenter recommended that the Department establish a clear definition of evidence for this element of the requirement, including what qualifies as evidence of State needs, how such evidence must be documented, and how it will be used to assess whether proposed services meet the identified needs.

Discussion: The Department appreciates the commenter's feedback. We agree that this requirement could be clarified to better capture the Department's intent for this requirement to convey that centers must be able to demonstrate how their proposed services align to State needs. As such, we have amended the language in this requirement to remove the reference to evidence and provide more clarity regarding the Department's expectations for the requirement.

Changes: We have amended Program Requirement 1 for All Centers to remove the reference to providing "evidence" and include additional language clarifying the requirement related to demonstrating how service plans reflect State priorities such as through documentation of State approval of services or alignment to State learning agendas.

Comments: One commenter recommended that the Department

provide definitions of several terms or concepts included throughout the priorities, requirements, and definitions, including: students with the greatest need; intensive and targeted projects, including the duration and intensity of each; and short, medium, and long-term outcomes, including the timeframes of each.

Discussion: We appreciate the commenter's feedback. The Department clarifies that, where the phrase "students with the greatest need" is used in Application Requirement 1 for All Centers, we refer in the requirement to Section 9602(e) of the ETAA, which discusses the scope of work for centers and how such work should be prioritized according to need. This also aligns with the reference to "students with the greatest need" incorporated into the definition of "high-leverage problems" established in the 2024 NFP and incorporated into the priorities, requirements, and definitions. This definition provides specific language that such students include students from low-income families and students attending schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement or targeted or additional targeted support and improvement activities under ESEA section 1111(d). Given these references where the term is used, we do not believe a specific definition of "students with the greatest need" is needed. Additionally, the Department notes that the priorities, requirements, and definitions already incorporate

definitions from the 2024 NFP for the following terms: "intensive capacity-building services", "targeted capacity-building services", and "outcomes," which includes definitions of short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes, including time frames for each type of outcome. We believe these existing definitions provide sufficient guidance as to the Department's understanding of these terms and do not believe additions or edits are needed. The full definitions of these terms can be reviewed in Appendix I.

Changes: None.

FINAL PRIORITIES:

The Department establishes the following priorities for use in this program. We may use one or more of these priorities in any year in which this program is in effect.

Priority 1: National Center

Projects that propose to establish and operate a National Center to coordinate client-driven technical assistance to address SEA, REA, TEA, and LEA priorities related to evidence use and implementation of evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes. The National Center will serve as a lead coordinator across the CC program to promote overall alignment and coherence of CCNetwork services, reduce burdens and barriers to service for States and beneficiaries, support coordination, dissemination, knowledge sharing, and connection across

Centers where multi-provider engagement is needed, and facilitate efficient use of program resources. The Center must conduct and share annual analyses of high-leverage problems identified by States; develop tools and resources that support delivery of high-quality, high-impact, differentiated technical assistance and capacity-building services across the CCNetwork, including common tools and resources to align capacity assessment, tracking, and reporting, support for State Learning Agendas, and quality assurance processes.

The Center must also procure expertise to provide high-quality, high-impact technical assistance to address common multi-State needs through targeted and universal capacity-building services through avenues such as State-to-State learning communities, in coordination with Regional and Content Centers; RELs; and other Department technical assistance providers, as applicable, to promote State engagement and avoid duplication.

Services must be designed to improve educational opportunities, educator practice, and student outcomes as described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA. Services shall address evidence-based national needs not already addressed by other federal investments, in consultation with the Center's Advisory Board, including: priorities identified through the analysis of high-leverage problems across the entire CCNetwork; priorities publicly established by

clients and potential clients, such as those identified in State Learning Agendas; common high-leverage problems identified in Regional Center service plans; findings from finalized Department monitoring reports or audit findings; implementation challenges faced by States and LEAs related to teaching, learning, and development; needs of schools designated for improvement; needs to improve core academic instruction; needs to address unique educational obstacles faced by rural and tribal students; and emerging education topics of national importance.

The Center will streamline access to qualified technical assistance providers by serving as a concierge-style support to intake technical assistance requests from SEAs, REAs, TEAs, and LEAs and facilitate access to Department technical assistance services within and beyond the CC program. In this capacity, the Center will design and implement a system to review inquiries and voluntary requests for technical assistance; identify technical assistance providers with relevant expertise, which may include Regional Centers and Content Centers within the CCNetwork, other Department technical assistance providers, and providers from a maintained registry cadre of qualified national subject matter experts to meet client needs; and coordinate support as needed for clients to access services from identified TA providers.

Priority 2: Regional Centers

Projects that propose to establish Regional Centers to provide intensive, client-driven technical assistance aligned to State and local priorities and needs related to selecting, implementing, and sustaining evidence-based programs, practices, and interventions in support of improved educator practice and student outcomes, especially in math and literacy.

Regional Centers must effectively work with the National Center, the REL in their region, federal technical assistance providers and Content Centers, as relevant and needed, to assist clients, reduce burdens and barriers to service for States and other clients, and avoid duplicative efforts and interventions. Regional Centers must develop cost-effective strategies to make their services available to as many SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and schools within the region in need of support as possible. Services must be designed to improve educational opportunities, educator practice, and student outcomes as described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA.

In compliance with the requirements of Section 9602(a)(2) of the ETAA, the Department intends to establish through this priority a minimum of 10 Regional Centers that will each serve a subset of States, with at least one Regional Center per REL region. For FY 2026 or any year in which this priority is used, the Department will publish the list of Regional Centers to be established in an

application notice and instructions. To determine the configuration of Regional Centers for any given competition, the Department will consider the factors outlined in the ETAA, including the school-age population, proportion of economically disadvantaged students, the increased cost burdens of service delivery in areas of sparse population, and the number of schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities and targeted support and improvement activities under section 1111(d) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in the population served by the local entity or consortium of such entities.

Priority 3: Content Centers

Projects that propose to establish and implement a Content Center to provide technical assistance on a specific topic of national or regional importance reflected across State and local needs and priorities. Content Centers must provide high-quality, useful, and relevant client-driven, targeted and universal capacity-building services to SEA, REA, TEA, LEA, and, for the National Comprehensive Center on Improving Literacy for Students with Disabilities, (NCIL), family clients designed to build State and local capacity and improve educational opportunities, educator practice, and student outcomes (as described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA) related to their specified topic area. Content Centers must support Regional

Centers, as needed, with subject matter expertise to enhance the intensive capacity-building services provided by the Regional Centers or to design universal or targeted capacity-building services to meet identified client needs.

The project must be aligned to one of the following focus areas:

Focus Area 1: Field-Initiated: To meet this focus area, an applicant must propose to establish and operate a Content Center to provide technical assistance to CC clients on an education topic of significant national or regional need, as identified by States and other CC clients. Proposals for Field-Initiated Centers must clearly identify the topic to be addressed and utilize applicable regional, State, and local educational data and needs analyses to provide evidence to demonstrate the national need for the proposed Center. Field-initiated topics must be aligned to authorized purposes described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA and may include, but are not limited to, proposals that focus on specific educational needs, such as improving math and literacy achievement, college and career readiness, closing achievement gaps, or encouraging and sustaining school improvement. Applicants must propose priority topics based on national or cross-regional needs expressed in State Learning Agendas or another similar identification of needs and priorities set

forth by SEAs, REAs, TEAs or LEAs from more than one region.

Field-Initiated Centers must provide high-quality, useful, and relevant targeted and universal capacity-building services in the designated content area of expertise to SEA, REA, TEA, and LEA clients. Services must be designed to improve educational opportunities, educator practice, and student outcomes as described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA. Content Centers must identify, synthesize, and disseminate evidence-based practices to build the capacity of practitioners, education system leaders, schools, LEAs, and SEAs to use evidence in the designated content area.

Focus Area 2: Emerging Need Centers: To meet this focus area, an applicant must propose to establish and operate a Content Center to provide technical assistance to CC clients on an education topic of significant national or regional need. For FY 2026 or any year in which this priority is used, the Department will identify specific topics of emerging national or regional need for the Center; topics will be aligned to the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities, areas of need identified in the Regional Advisory Committee reports, the technical assistance topics identified in the ETAA, or other critical aspects of need related to quality implementation of programs under the ESEA. Applicants will be required to

address the identified topic areas in order to be considered for funding under this focus area.

Proposals for Emerging Need Centers must clearly demonstrate how the Center will address the established topic, provide data and evidence to illustrate the technical assistance needs of CC clients related to the topic and propose an approach to capacity-building services that meet these technical assistance needs in the established topic area.

Emerging Need Centers must provide high-quality, useful, and relevant targeted and universal capacity-building services in the designated content area of expertise to SEA, REA, TEA, and LEA clients. Services must be designed to improve educational opportunities, educator practice, and student outcomes as described in section 9602(f) of the ETAA. Content Centers must identify, synthesize, and disseminate evidence-based practices to build the capacity of practitioners, education system leaders, schools, LEAs, and SEAs to use evidence in the designated content area.

Focus Area 3: National Comprehensive Center on Improving Literacy for Students with Disabilities (ALN 84.283D): To meet this priority, an applicant under this focus area must propose to establish and operate a National Comprehensive Center on Improving Literacy for Students with Disabilities (NCIL) focused on children in early

childhood education programs through high school at risk of not attaining full literacy skills due to a disability, including dyslexia impacting reading or writing, or developmental delay impacting reading, writing, language processing, comprehension, or executive functioning.

The Center must:

- (a) Identify or develop free or low-cost evidence-based literacy assessment tools for identifying students at risk of not attaining full literacy skills due to a disability,
- (b) Identify evidence-based literacy instruction, strategies, and accommodations, including assistive technology, designed to meet the specific needs of such students;
- (c) Provide families of such students with information to assist such students;
- (d) Identify or develop evidence-based professional development for teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, other school leaders, and specialized instructional support personnel to: understand early indicators of students at risk of not attaining full literacy skills due to a disability, including dyslexia impacting reading or writing, or developmental delay impacting reading, writing, language processing, comprehension, or executive functioning; use evidence-based screening assessments for early identification of such students beginning not later

than kindergarten; and implement evidence-based instruction designed to meet the specific needs of such students; and (e) disseminate the products of the Comprehensive Center to regionally diverse SEAs, LEAs, REAs, and schools, including, as appropriate, through partnerships with other CCs established under section 9602 of this title, and RELs established under section 9564 of this title.

Types of Priorities:

When inviting applications for a competition using one or more priorities, we designate the type of each priority as absolute, competitive preference, or invitational through an application notice and instructions document. The effect of each type of priority follows:

Absolute priority: Under an absolute priority, we consider only applications that meet the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(3)).

Competitive preference priority: Under a competitive preference priority, we give competitive preference to an application by (1) awarding additional points, depending on the extent to which the application meets the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(i)); or (2) selecting an application that meets the priority over an application of comparable merit that does not meet the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(ii)).

Invitational priority: Under an invitational priority, we are particularly interested in applications that meet the priority. However, we do not give an application that

meets the priority a preference over other applications (34 CFR 75.105(c)(1)).

FINAL REQUIREMENTS:

The Department establishes the following application and program requirements for this program. We may apply one or more of these requirements in any year in which the program is in effect.

Program Requirements

Program Requirements for All Centers: National, Regional, and Content Center grantees under this program must:

(1) Create client driven service plans annually for carrying out the technical assistance and capacity-building services to be delivered by the Center in response to identified educational challenges facing students, practitioners, and education system leaders. In developing the annual service plan, the Center must demonstrate that services reflect State-identified needs and leadership priorities for assistance, such as through documentation of State approval of services and alignment to State Learning Agendas. Plans must include: High-leverage problems to be addressed, including identified client needs, capacity-building services to be delivered², time-based outcomes (i.e., short-term, mid-term, long-term), responsible personnel, key technical assistance partners, milestones,

² Services may include universal, targeted, and intensive capacity-building services in any of the four dimensions of capacity building services as defined by this program: human capacity, organizational capacity, policy capacity, and resource capacity.

outputs, dissemination plans, fidelity measures, if appropriate, and any other elements specified by the Department. Additionally, plans must demonstrate how services will prioritize support for students and communities with the highest needs, as described in section 9602(e) of the ETAA.³

(2) Design and implement streamlined client-driven capacity-building services in partnership with State and local beneficiaries to reflect and address specific client needs and desired outcomes.

(3) Demonstrate to the Department that it has engaged clients in defining proposed service projects and that it has secured client and partner commitments to carry out proposed annual service plans.

(4) Develop and implement an effective performance management and evaluation system that integrates continuous improvement to promote effective achievement of client outcomes. The system must include methods to measure and monitor progress towards agreed upon outcomes, outputs, and milestones and to measure the reach, use, and impact of the services being delivered to ensure capacity-building services are implemented as intended, reaching intended

³ Section 9602(e) of the ETAA requires each CC to prioritize school serving high percentages or number of students from low-income families, including such schools in rural and urban areas and those receiving assistance under Title I of the ESEA; LEAs with high percentages or numbers of school-age children from low-income families, including such LEAs in rural and urban areas; and schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities or targeted support and improvement activities under section 1111(d) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [20 U.S.C. 6311(d)].

clients and recipients, and achieving desired results. Progress monitoring must include periodic assessment of client satisfaction and timely identification of changes in State contexts that may impact the project's success. The performance management system must include strategies to report on defined program performance measures.

(5) Participate in a national evaluation of the CC Program. *Program Requirements for National Comprehensive Center:* In addition to the requirements for all Centers, National Center grantees under this program must:

(1) Include in its service plan specifically in the first year, and additionally in subsequent years, projects to develop the tools, resources, services, and processes it will implement to adequately support collaboration, coordination, continuous improvement, dissemination and knowledge sharing across the CCNetwork, including common tools and resources to align capacity assessment, tracking, and reporting to deliver services that effectively build client capacity for evidence use and implementation of evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes.

(2) Coordinate and refine processes, tools, and resources to support Regional Centers and RELs to work with individual States to develop or refine, as appropriate, and implement a multi-year State Learning Agenda to identify needs and set priorities for evidence building and educational program implementation and that will serve as a

key input in annual service plans and capacity-building services.

(3) Design and implement a coordinated process to identify emerging high-leverage problems that could be effectively addressed through client driven annual service plans.

Conduct and publish an annual synthesis of common high-priority needs across States and consult with and integrate ongoing feedback from its Advisory Board, the Department, Regional Centers, and Content Centers to inform targeted and universal support needs from the National Center, Content Centers, or other Centers, as needed, and enable cross-regional peer learning on shared challenges.

(4) Design effective services to meet demonstrated collective needs with tangible, achievable capacity-building outcomes resulting from beneficiary participation. Provide opportunities for beneficiaries, including States, to learn from their peers and subject matter experts through targeted and universal capacity-building services. Universal services must be produced in a manner that beneficiaries are most likely to use, be shared via multiple digital platforms, such as the CCNetwork website, social media, and other channels as appropriate, and be relevant for a variety of education stakeholders, including the general public.

(5) Solicit, vet, and provide access to an expansive and comprehensive cadre of national subject matter experts

available to support CC services, that includes qualified education practitioners, researchers, policy professionals, and other implementation consultants with (i) direct experience and demonstrated impact working in or with SEAs, REAs, TEAs and LEAs to improve student outcomes and (ii) in-depth expertise in specific subject areas available to support universal, targeted and intensive services in a variety of content areas as reflected by State and local priorities and other emerging needs to be made available to support State needs for any National, Regional Center, REL or Content Center projects. Make the cadre available through a registry containing sufficient and transparent information that clients may request in determining the most appropriate providers to meet their needs, including client reviews of past performance, demonstrated products and outcomes of services provided, and transparent service pricing. The cadre should reflect client input and be continually expanded to include new providers, as needed, to meet client needs.

(6) Design and implement a concierge-style service to intake and assess inquiries and voluntary technical assistance requests from CC clients, including States, identify technical assistance providers with relevant expertise, and direct client requests for technical assistance to their Regional Center, REL, and other Department technical assistance providers to streamline

awareness and access to technical assistance while maintaining client autonomy in selecting the technical assistance services, provider(s), and supports received. This service must encompass systems to review incoming inquiries and requests for technical assistance from CC clients; to identify appropriate resources and technical assistance providers, which may include Regional Centers and Content Centers within the CCNetwork, other Department technical assistance providers, and national subject matter experts as needed to meet client needs; and to coordinate support for clients to access services from identified TA providers. This service must encompass Department technical assistance investments within and beyond the CCNetwork.

(7) Design, operate and maintain communications and dissemination vehicles for the CCNetwork, including maintaining the CCNetwork website with an easy-to-navigate design that meets government or industry recognized standards for accessibility, including compliance with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and maintain a consistent media presence, in collaboration with Regional and Content Centers and the Department, utilizing effective media and dissemination strategies that promote increased access and engagement with CCNetwork resources.

(8) Create peer learning opportunities for CCNetwork staff (and other partners, as appropriate) to address implementation challenges and scale effective best

practices to improve service delivery across the CCNetwork.

(9) Ensure that the Project Director can manage all aspects of the Center and is either staffed at 1 FTE or the Project Director and Co-Director or Deputies are staffed at a minimum of 1.5 FTE collectively. Dedicate sufficient resources within the Center's annual budget to meet all aspects of the priority and program requirements, including sufficient capacity for coordination responsibilities and direct services, as needed.

Program Requirements for Regional Centers: In addition to the requirements for all Centers, Regional Center grantees under this program must:

(1) Actively coordinate and collaborate with the REL serving their region to implement technical assistance in response to needs and priorities of shared clients.

Coordination must include annual joint planning and establishment of a joint advisory board that meets the requirements under the ETAA Sec 203(g) (20 U.S.C. 9602).

The joint advisory board must be designed to inform and improve service delivery across both programs while reducing burden on State agencies.

(2) Partner with the REL serving their region, with support from the National Center, as needed, to work with each State in the region to develop or refine, as appropriate, and implement a multi-year State Learning Agenda to identify needs and set priorities for evidence building and

educational program implementation. The Center must develop the annual service plan from the priorities established by States in their Learning Agendas, as well as other relevant feedback from stakeholders, including Chief State School Officers and other SEA leaders, TEAs, LEAs, educators, students, and parents, to reflect the most pressing needs of all States (and to the extent practicable, of LEAs) within the region to be served.

(3) Partner with clients to identify and select the subject matter expertise needed to provide effective capacity building services for all annual service plan projects, including utilizing the National Center cadre of subject matter experts, to evaluate options and procure expertise from a broad range of sources.

(4) Establish and provide the Department copies of partnership agreements with the REL(s) in the region that the Center serves, the National Center, and as appropriate, other Department-funded technical assistance providers. Partnership agreements must define processes to meet relevant program requirements.

(5) Be located in the region served. The Project Director must be capable of managing all aspects of the Center and be either at a minimum of 0.75 FTE or there must be two Co-Project Directors at a minimum of 1.0 FTE collectively.

Program Requirements for Content Centers: In addition to the requirements for all Centers, grantees under this

program must:

(1) Consult and integrate feedback from States, CC clients (including, for the NCIL, families), the Department, National and Regional Centers, and other stakeholders and Department technical assistance Centers, as relevant to the Center's content area in developing the annual service plan to inform high-quality tools, resources, and overall technical assistance in priority areas.

(2) Partner with the National Center and Regional Centers as needed to directly support their States in the development and implementation of State Learning Agendas; to address requests for assistance from States within the regions; and to strengthen Regional Center staff knowledge and expertise on the evidence base and effective practices as appropriate based on the Content Center's specific focus area.

(3) Establish and provide copies to the Department of partnership agreements with the National Center, Regional Centers, as needed, and Department-funded technical assistance providers with expertise relevant to the Center's area. Partnership agreements must define processes to meet relevant CC program requirements.

(4) The Project Director must be capable of managing all aspects of the Center and be either at a minimum of 0.5 FTE or there must be two Co-Project Directors at a minimum of 0.75 FTE collectively.

Application Requirements

Application Requirements for All Centers

(1) Describe its proposed approach to capacity-building services. This must include a logic model, as well as a description of the evidence base and strategies that support its approach to capacity building services; evidence of the applicant's ability to provide effective capacity building services, such as relevant expertise and demonstrated results from similar projects and demonstrated expertise of key personnel; the impact the Center plans to achieve and how they will measure that impact; and the proposed approach to providing capacity-building services to students with the greatest need as described in Sec. 9602(e) of the ETAA, to address the needs of all SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and, as appropriate, schools served.

(2) Describe the proposed process to identify, in partnership with CC clients, the most urgent educational challenges to be addressed, including how the Center will ensure that the challenges to be addressed are supported by data and evidence and reflected by State and local needs and priorities.

(3) Describe the proposed approach to measure and monitor client progress or success in overcoming the challenges to be addressed, including how the Center will use data and evidence to demonstrate outcomes of universal, targeted, and intensive capacity building services, as applicable.

(4) Demonstrate expertise in providing highly relevant and highly effective technical assistance, including by demonstrating expertise in the current research on adult learning principles, coaching, and implementation science.

(5) Include in the budget narrative explanation of and estimated costs for intensive, targeted, and universal capacity-building services. Describe how the Center will promote cost-effectiveness of services, including ensuring that the estimated costs are aligned to market expectations for similar services.

(6) Describe the proposed leadership structure for the Center and how the organizational leadership will effectively manage the project according to the needs of the program, including how the leadership structure provides organizational capacity to assess, manage, and strategically utilize program resources.

(7) Include in the budget a line item for an annual set-aside of five percent of the grant amount to support emerging needs that are consistent with the proposed project's intended outcomes.

Application Requirements for the National Center: In addition to meeting the application requirements for all Centers, a National Center applicant must:

(1) Propose an approach to leading coordination and collaboration of the entire CCNetwork, including how the Center will fulfill the requirements to serve as a

concierge-level point of entry to Department technical assistance for States and other CC clients; to develop and administer access to a national cadre of subject matter experts with a broad range of expertise, demonstrated impact, and proven satisfaction serving CC clients; to coordinate and refine processes, tools, and resources to support Regional Centers and RELs to develop or refine and implement multi-year State Learning Agendas; and to identify emerging high-leverage problems that could be effectively addressed through client driven annual service plans.

(2) Demonstrate a high-level of expertise in leading communication and digital engagement strategies to attract and sustain the involvement of a wide range of education stakeholders. Provide an approach to creating a robust web and social media presence, overseeing customer relations management, providing editorial support to Regional and Content Centers, and utilizing web analytics and other tools to improve content engagement.

(3) Propose an approach to procuring expertise to provide targeted and universal capacity-building services to support beneficiaries in addressing common high-leverage problems, including how the applicant intends to collaborate with Regional Centers to identify potential beneficiaries, and to maximize how many SEAs, REAs, TEAs, and LEAs it has the capacity to reach with available

services.

Application Requirements for Regional Centers: In addition to meeting the application requirements for all Centers, a Regional Center applicant must—

(1) Propose an approach to intensive capacity-building services, including identification of intended beneficiaries based on available data for specific regions, and details on how the Center will ensure proposed capacity-building services are driven by client needs and co-developed with client input.

Application Requirements for Content Centers: In addition to meeting the application requirements for all Centers, a Content Center applicant must—

(1) Propose an approach to carry out capacity-building services that address client needs and priorities (to include those of families, for applicants to NCIL) that amplify the use of evidence-based practices, products or tools amongst practitioners, education system leaders, elementary schools and secondary schools, LEAs, REAs and TEAs, and SEAs.

(2) Propose an approach to providing universal capacity-building services, including how the Center will develop and widely disseminate evidence-based products or tools; outreach to practitioners, education system leaders, and policymakers in formats that are high quality, easily accessible, and understandable; identify intended

beneficiaries; and ensure that proposed capacity-building services are driven by client needs and co-developed with client input.

(3) Describe the educational challenges to be addressed by the project, including how the challenges to be addressed are aligned to Section 9602(f)(1) of the ETAA and supported by data and evidence and reflected by cross-regional State and local needs and priorities. The description must utilize applicable national, regional, State, and local educational data to demonstrate the identified needs that could be addressed through the proposed capacity-building approach to implement and scale up evidence-based programs, practices, and interventions.

FINAL DEFINITIONS:

The Department establishes the following definition of "beneficiary" for use in this program in any year in which this program is in effect. We may apply this definition in any year in which this program is in effect.

We also use in the final priorities and requirements the following terms, which are defined in the ESEA: "evidence-based" and "tribal educational agency" and the term "logic model", which is defined in CFR 77.1. The final priorities, requirements, and definitions also incorporate definitions from a 2019 Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definition, and Performance Measures (2019 NFP) published in the *Federal Register* on April 4, 2019 (84

FR 13122) and a 2024 Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria (2024 NFP) published in the *Federal Register* on May 13, 2024 (89 FR 41498). The terms from the 2019 NFP are: "milestone" and "outputs." The terms from the 2024 NFP are: "capacity-building services," "client," "collaboration", "coordination", "educator", "four dimensions of capacity-building services," "high-leverage problems," "intensive capacity-building services", "key personnel", "outcomes", "regional educational agency", "targeted capacity-building services," and "universal capacity-building services." We have included the definitions of those terms in Appendix I to this document.

Beneficiary means organizations including, but not limited to, SEAs, LEAs, REAs, TEAs, and schools that have received "intensive" and "targeted" capacity-building services and products from Regional Centers, or that received "targeted" or "universal" capacity-building services and products from the National Center or Content Centers.

Evidence-based has the meaning ascribed in section 7801(21) of the ESEA.

Logic model has the meaning ascribed in 34 CFR 77.1(c).

Tribal educational agency has the meaning ascribed in section 6132(b)(3) of the ESEA.

Note: This document does not solicit applications.

In any year in which we choose to use any of the final

priorities, requirements, and definitions, we invite applications through an ANI.

Executive Orders 12866, 13563, and 14192

Regulatory Impact Analysis: This regulatory action is not a significant regulatory action subject to review by the Office of Management and Budget under section 3(f) of Executive Order 12866. Since this regulatory action is not a significant regulatory action under section 3(f) of Executive Order 12866, it is not considered an "Executive Order 14192 regulatory action." We have also reviewed this regulatory action under Executive Order 13563. We are issuing the priorities, requirements, and definitions only on a reasoned determination that their benefits would justify their costs. The Department believes that this regulatory action is consistent with the principles in Executive Order 13563. We also have determined that this regulatory action would not unduly interfere with State, local, and Tribal governments in the exercise of their governmental functions. In accordance with these Executive Orders, the Department has assessed the potential costs and benefits, both quantitative and qualitative, of this regulatory action. The potential costs are limited to those resulting from statutory requirements; those we have determined are necessary for administering the Department's programs and activities; or those routinely associated with the adoption of new program priorities, including the

potential early end of the prior cohort project activities in favor of re-competition under the new priorities.

Discussion of Costs and Benefits: The Department believes that these priorities, requirements, and definitions would not impose significant costs on eligible entities, whose participation in this program is voluntary, and whose costs can generally be covered with grant funds. As addressed in part above, in response to certain comments regarding the potential cessation of previously-funded CC project activities, the Department recognizes that this rulemaking may result in some economic impact to current CC grantees or future CC applicants. For example, the Department anticipates that grantees within the 2024 cohort will incur some costs if the Department makes a determination to end their projects in FY2026. However, the Department believes any reliance interests at issue in continued implementation of the 2024 cohort project activities to not be significant for four reasons: first, grantee funding in a multi-year project is never guaranteed for a subsequent budget period, and eligibility for non-competitive continuation funding is always contingent upon a number of prospective factors, including grantee performance, the availability of funding, the grantee continuing to meet all eligibility requirements, and changing administration priorities .

Second, if it is decided to end projects early, as part of their orderly closeout, 2024 cohort grantees would be able

to charge reasonable and necessary closeout costs to their respective grants under their current budget year, thereby further limiting economic impact to previously-obligated federal funds. Third, the benefits of aligning the CC and REL programs, and the fact that resource sharing and reduced burden to States from stronger coordination and alignment will be created with the REL cohort scheduled to begin at approximately same time as a new CC cohort, outweigh these costs. Finally, the Department anticipates that the potential costs articulated for the 2024 cohort above will be minimal for program beneficiaries, as the Department will be able to facilitate in any transfer of services that could arise if there is a change in providers resulting from a new competition, consistent with the procedures the Department employed when winding down and transferring work from prior CC grantees in 2019 and 2024. Overall, the priorities, requirements, and definitions would not impose any particular burden, except when an entity voluntarily elects to apply for a grant. The priorities, requirements, and definitions would help ensure that the grant program selects high-quality applicants to implement activities that meet the goals of the program. For the reasons described above, we believe these benefits would outweigh any associated costs.

Intergovernmental Review: This action is subject to Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR part

79. This document provides early notification of our specific plans and actions for this program.

Regulatory Flexibility Act Certification: This section considers the effects that the final regulations may have on small entities in the educational sector as required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act, 5 U.S.C. 601 et seq. The Secretary certifies that this regulatory action would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The U.S. Small Business Administration Size Standards define proprietary institutions as small businesses if they are independently owned and operated, are not dominant in their field of operation, and have total annual revenue below \$7,000,000. Nonprofit institutions are defined as small entities if they are independently owned and operated and not dominant in their field of operation. Public institutions are defined as small organizations if they are operated by a government overseeing a population below 50,000. Participation in this program is voluntary. For this reason, the final priorities, requirements, and definitions would impose no burden on small entities unless they applied for funding under the program. We expect that in determining whether to apply for any project under the CC program, an eligible applicant would evaluate the requirements of preparing an application and any associated costs and weigh them against the benefits likely to be achieved by receiving a CC grant.

Eligible applicants most likely would apply only if they determine that the likely benefits exceed the costs of preparing an application. The likely benefits include the potential receipt of a grant as well as other benefits that may accrue to an entity through its development of an application.

Paperwork Reduction Act: The final priorities, requirements, and definitions contain information collection requirements that are approved by OMB under the Generic Application Package for Departmental Generic Grant Programs (OMB control number 1894-0006). The priorities, requirements, and definitions do not affect the currently approved data collection.

Accessible Format: On request to the program contact person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**, individuals with disabilities can obtain this document in an accessible format. The Department will provide the requestor with an accessible format that may include Rich Text Format (RTF) or text format (txt), a thumb drive, an MP3 file, braille, large print, audiotape, compact disc, or another accessible format.

Kirsten Baesler,
Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education.

Appendix I

The priorities, requirements, and definitions incorporate the following terms established for use in this program by

the 2019 and 2024 NFPs:

Capacity-building services means assistance that strengthens an individual's or organization's ability to engage in continuous improvement and achieve expected outcomes. (2024 NFP)

Client means the organization with which the Center enters into agreement for negotiated capacity-building services. The client is engaged in defining the high-leverage problems, capacity-building services, and time-based outcomes for each project noted in the Center's annual service plan. Representatives of clients include but are not limited to Chief State School Officers or their designees, LEA leaders, and other system leaders. (2024 NFP)

Collaboration means exchanging information, altering activities, and sharing in the creation of ideas and resources to enhance the capacity of one another for mutual benefit to accomplish a common goal. (2024 NFP)

Coordination means exchanging information, altering activities, and synchronizing efforts to make unique contributions to shared goals. (2024 NFP) *Educator* means an individual who is a teacher (including an early education teacher), principal or other school leader, administrator, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, school social worker, librarian, early intervention service personnel), paraprofessional,

faculty, and others. (2024 NFP)

Four dimensions of capacity-building services are:

(1) *Human capacity* means development or improvement of individual knowledge, skills, technical expertise, and ability to adapt and be resilient to policy and leadership changes.

(2) *Organizational capacity* means structures that support clear communication and a shared understanding of an organization's visions and goals and delineated individual roles and responsibilities in functional areas.

(3) *Policy capacity* means structures that support alignment, differentiation, or enactment of local, State, and Federal policies and initiatives.

(4) *Resource capacity* means tangible materials and assets that support alignment and use of Federal, State, private, and local funds. (2024 NFP)

High-leverage problems means problems that (1) if addressed could result in substantial improvements for groups of students with the greatest need, including for students from low-income families and for students attending schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement or targeted or additional targeted support and improvement activities under ESEA section 1111(d)); (2) are priorities for education policymakers, particularly at the State level; and (3) require intensive capacity-building services to achieve outcomes that address the problem. (2024 NFP)

Intensive capacity-building services means assistance often provided on-site and requiring a stable, ongoing relationship between the Comprehensive Center and its clients and recipients, as well as periodic reflection, continuous feedback, and use of evidence-based improvement strategies. This category of capacity-building services should support increased recipient capacity in more than one dimension of capacity-building services and result in medium-term and long-term outcomes at one or more system levels. (2024 NFP)

Key personnel means any personnel considered to be essential to the work being performed on the project. (2024 NFP)

Milestone means an activity that must be completed. Examples include: Identifying key district administrators responsible for professional development, sharing key observations from needs assessment with district administrators and identified stakeholders, preparing a logic model, planning for State-wide professional development, identifying subject matter experts, and conducting train-the-trainer sessions. (2019 NFP)

Outcomes means demonstrable effects of receiving capacity-building services and must reflect the result of capacity built in at least one of the four dimensions of capacity building. "Outcomes" includes short-term outcomes, medium-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes:

(1) *Short-term outcomes* means effects of receiving capacity-building services after 1 year.

(2) *Medium-term outcomes* means effects of receiving capacity-building services after 2 to 3 years.

(3) *Long-term outcomes* means effects of receiving capacity-building services after 4 or more years. (2024 NFP)

Outputs means products and services that must be completed. Examples include: Needs assessment, logic model, training modules, evaluation plan, and 12 workshop presentations.

(2024 NFP)

Note: A product output under this program would be considered a deliverable under the open licensing regulations at 2 CFR 3474.20.

Regional educational agency means educational agencies that serve regional areas within a State. (2024 NFP)

Targeted capacity-building services means assistance based on needs common to multiple clients and recipients and not extensively individualized. A relationship is established between the recipient(s), the National Center or Content Center, and Regional Center(s), as appropriate. This category of capacity-building services includes one-time, labor-intensive events, such as facilitating strategic planning or hosting national or regional conferences. It can also include services that extend over a period of time, such as facilitating a series of conference calls, virtual or in-person meetings, or learning communities on

single or multiple topics that are designed around the needs of the recipients. Facilitating communities of practice can also be considered targeted capacity-building services. (2024 NFP)

Universal capacity-building services means assistance and information provided to independent users through their own initiative, involving minimal interaction with National or Content Center staff. This category of capacity-building services includes information or products, such as newsletters, guidebooks, policy briefs, or research syntheses, downloaded from the Center's website by independent users, and may include one-time, invited or offered webinar or conference presentations by National or Content Center staff. Brief communications or consultations by National or Content Center staff with recipients, either by telephone or email, are also considered universal services. (2024 NFP)

[FR Doc. 2026-09203 Filed: 5/7/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 5/8/2026]