



A Guide to the Regional Advisory Committees

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES?

The U.S. Secretary of Education has appointed 10 Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) to advise the U.S. Department of Education on the technical assistance needs of educators in ten geographic regions across the nation. The RACs will conduct an educational needs assessment of their regions and submit a report to the Secretary. The results of these assessments will be used to assist the Secretary in establishing funding priorities for new comprehensive technical assistance centers and regional educational laboratories that will help state education agencies, school districts, and schools to implement the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Identifying and prioritizing the educational needs of schools, districts, and states in each region will be critical to making sure that each has the help it needs to meet the goals of NCLB.

WHO IS REPRESENTED IN THE RACs?

Each RAC includes one or more representatives from each state in the region. The number of representatives on any given RAC reflects the size of that region. The majority of RAC members include parents, local education agency representatives (including rural and urban), and practicing educators (teachers, principals, administrators, school board members, and local school officials). Business persons, researchers and representatives of institutions of higher education make up the remainder of the committee. Each state education agency is also represented.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RACs?

Each RAC is tasked with soliciting information and views, gathering findings, posing solutions concerning its region's education needs and how best to address them, and reporting them to the Secretary. In addition to inviting input on the region's needs, each RAC will seek input on ways to meet these regional educational needs through dissemination, technical assistance, and research findings.

Members of each RAC work together as a group and their report will reflect a consensus. Each RAC develops a plan and schedule of activities to conduct the needs assessment, using tools and strategies outlined in more detail below. These activities include virtual hearings and focus groups to gather input from key stakeholders in each region.

RAC members are not expected to speak for the organizations and interest groups they represent. Their job is to solicit input and comment from stakeholders across the region to ensure that the views and concerns of parents, teachers, administrators, and others are heard. They may not speak on behalf of an organization that nominated them or with which they are affiliated.

Each RAC will submit a final report to the Secretary of Education and Director of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) on a date in March 2005 (to be announced).

HOW WILL THE RACs ACCOMPLISH THEIR TASKS?

RAC meetings are governed by the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), which sets forth the standards for the formation and use of advisory committees. FACA requires that a designated federal official (DFO) be assigned to each committee. It is the responsibility of a DFO to call, attend, and adjourn meetings. The DFO must also approve agenda, maintain records on costs, ensure efficient operations and public involvement, and maintain a record of a committee's work.

Requirements in the FACA will guide the conduct of RAC meetings with individuals, agencies, and organizations that aim to assess a region's educational and technical assistance needs. Each full committee, or quorum, of a RAC will conduct its work electronically. Meetings involving a majority of RAC members, including substantive discussions or data gathering activities, must be open to the public. Each RAC will set its own schedule of meetings during the orientation meeting in December, which will subsequently be posted in the Federal Register and in announcements from various organizations that are assisting in an outreach effort.

Given the short time frame and limited resources available, each RAC will make full use of the broad reach of web-based and other electronic means to communicate with each other and the general public. Face-to-face and paper-based means of communicating, collaborating, and collecting data should be used *only* when computer communication is not possible.

WHAT GOES INTO THE RAC REPORTS?

The reports will advise the U.S. Secretary of Education and Director of the Institute of Education Sciences on the educational needs and the technical assistance requirements of the regions and how those requirements can be met. Reports will not require any government clearance. The RACs will be guided by the legislative mandate, planning schedules, and reporting requirements. The final reports will include findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The reports will address three concerns:

- The critical educational needs of states and local communities, particularly those related to improving school performance and student achievement and implementing NCLB
- The region's technical assistance requirements to meet the needs of different stakeholder (user) groups
- The opportunities for comprehensive technical assistance centers and laboratories to effectively meet ongoing and emerging education needs.

WHAT PURPOSE WILL THE RAC REPORTS SERVE?

The technical assistance priorities identified in the reports will inform and assist the Secretary in determining funding priorities for upcoming competitions for federally funded technical assistance centers and regional educational laboratories. Federal legislation authorizes comprehensive technical assistance centers to help states and school districts in the implementation of programs to achieve the goals of the NCLB Act by "developing assessments, training teachers, providing technical assistance in core subject areas, education technology, English language acquisition, and disseminating data and interpreting research."

Regional educational laboratories are authorized to support research, development, dissemination, and technical assistance activities. The labs advance the use of scientifically valid research in education and support a wide portfolio of activities that includes technical assistance to state and local educational agencies, school boards, schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as appropriate, and state boards of education.

WHAT GUIDANCE WILL THE RACs RECEIVE?

The Secretary has issued a charter for the RACs describing their purpose and functions, structure, roles and responsibilities, reporting requirements, meetings, remuneration, and ending date. Additionally, each RAC will receive a regional profile that captures relevant data including the status and condition of schools in the representative states—emphasizing the performance of states and schools in meeting federal and state accountability requirements and student achievement. The RACs will receive other supporting information throughout the process. The RACs will build on this foundation, as they review, discuss, and analyze new sources of data, and expand on that foundation with information gleaned from their public hearings.

The Assistant Secretary of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), has appointed a designated federal official (DFO) to assist each RAC. The DFO acts as a liaison between the Department and the RAC. The DFO will help ensure that all FACA requirements are met. DFOs will call meetings in consultation with the chairperson and assist the committees in ensuring compliances with FACA laws and GSA regulations.

WHAT ARE THE 10 RAC REGIONS?

The 10 regions are the same geographic regions served by the existing national network education laboratories and include the following states and entities:

Region 1: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina

Region 2: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

Region 3: Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah

Region 4: Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia

Region 5: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and Virgin Islands

Region 6: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC

Region 7: Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming

Region 8: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin

Region 9: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington

Region 10: Hawaii, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, And Yap), Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

HOW CAN INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS PROVIDE INPUT?

The RAC website is located at www.RAC-ED.org and includes a section for each region. Following the RAC orientation meeting in Washington, D.C. on 2–3 December 2004, the public will be able to register on the site. Everyone can view all of the information posted on the website, but only registered members will be able to provide input online. If members of the public do not wish to register, they may provide input by email to RAC@cna.org (Subject Header: [Region name] Comments) or by mail to:

[Region name] RAC Support
Attn: Dr. Arthur Sheekey
The CNA Corporation
4825 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311-1850

RAC SUPPORT TEAM

The CNA Corporation (CNAC), with its partners, has been contracted to provide procedural, logistical, and administrative support for each RAC. CNAC will provide a coordination team, composed of a senior facilitator and a research assistant, for each committee. The facilitator will work with the committee chair and the DFO to organize public meetings, serve as moderator, and provide meeting minutes. In addition, the coordination team will assist the RACs in collecting and synthesizing relevant information and in drafting the final report.

The CNAC team will also provide technical support. RAC meetings will be conducted using digital communication equipment, including webcasts of the orientation meeting, online conferencing of RAC meetings, and a RAC website for information collection and dissemination. Information on accessing the webcasts and online conferences can be found at www.RAC-ED.org.