



*National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of
Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities –
Personnel Improvement Center (PIC)*

Issue Brief

An Introduction to Personnel Preparation Program Partnerships

This brief was written by the National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities, known as the *Personnel Improvement Center (PIC)*, to provide information about successful partnerships that lead to productive relationships between personnel preparation programs and local school districts/programs in need of personnel.

Educational service systems require that *qualified and capable personnel* be ready and able to implement services. In this equation, careful planning of personnel preparation that meets local needs is critical.



State Challenges

States have major challenges to address as they seek to ensure there is an adequate supply of qualified personnel who can provide educational services to all students. One challenge is the availability of opportunities for urban and rural candidates to access early intervention and special education-related preparation programs in their local communities. This includes the development of para-professional-to-teacher training for high need programs and districts. A second challenge is the availability of programs in low-incidence areas such as deaf blindness.

Personnel preparation program partnerships may be one solution to effectively meet these training needs and challenges.



Those responsible for oversight and delivery of personnel preparation, especially university faculty and state departments of education, have an opportunity to facilitate the collaboration needed to create these preparation program partnerships. By taking on a leadership role in this work, they can connect consumers with the various resources available and assist in the development of essential infrastructures needed for preparation partnerships to be successful and self-sustaining over time. As linking agents, individuals from State Departments of Special Education can span boundaries and bring resources from the larger environment to the local education agency/program and university faculty can share resources and students across university platforms. Most importantly, they can build the open relationships that are necessary to collaborate in the delivery of personnel preparation programs that can be beneficial to all partners.

Framework for Success

This brief has been created to share one perspective on the critical links to consider in building a comprehensive, collaborative partnership for personnel development across multiple stakeholders, including state, local and preparation programs. It is our hope that the following framework will facilitate your understanding of the complexities that exist in personnel preparation systems, as states seek to meet the need for qualified special education personnel that are essential to serving children with disabilities, birth through 21 years of age.



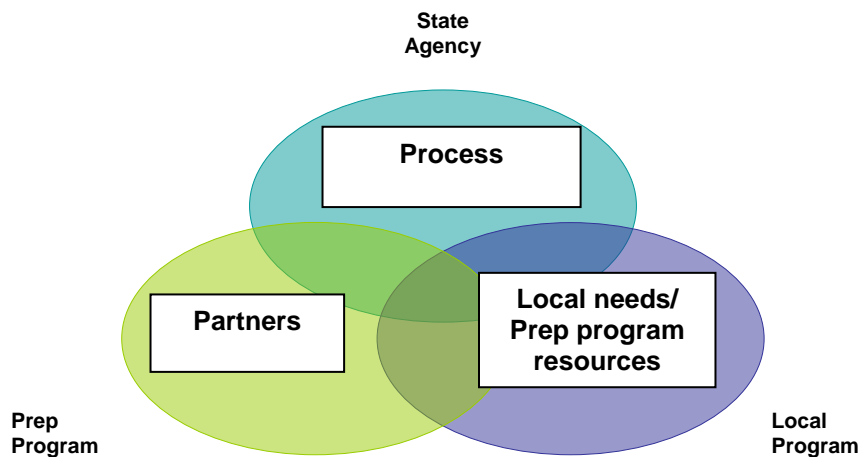
In order for the framework to be used successfully and effectively implemented, linking agents will need to focus on building collaborative preparation partnerships with early intervention providers, local school districts, and community colleges/four year institutions.

This framework can help state, local and preparation program staff to build the essential supports needed for effective working relationships and continued discussions.

Building trust among partners requires *time, face-to-face opportunities for discussions, and consistency with the individuals involved.* These requirements are key to important and lasting change and will eventually lead to the positive impacts needed in building capacity for special education personnel development.

This framework offers a process through which planners can guide personnel preparation program partnership efforts to achieve the desired preparation results.

Framework for the Development of Personnel Preparation Program Partnerships



Partners

- Who are the partners? (include state, local and prep programs reps)
- How will they be contacted and selected?
- What will their roles be within the partnership?

Process

- How will the partnership be initiated?
- What resources will each partner bring to the relationship?
- What communication strategies need to be in place for on-going work?
- How will coordination across multiple agencies (state and local) and institutions be addressed?
- What state/local or institutional policies are already in place that may influence the partnership's scope or choice of implementation strategies?

Local needs/Prep Program resources

- What are the local needs in relation to numbers and types of personnel?
- What features are already in place that can facilitate accessibility to programs?

Steps to Implementing Personnel Preparation Program PartnershipsStep 1: Start with Data

Personnel Data Management is essential to planning for and maintaining an adequate supply of personnel. Data management involves a set of processes, policies, services, and technologies used to create, maintain, and manage data associated with a state or district's personnel.

Assessing the current state of your personnel data should include analyzing recruitment and retention information, as well as numbers of personnel being prepared in each of the state's personnel preparation programs. This should include:

- personnel data analysis to determine areas of greatest strengths (local, state and institutional) and
- personnel data analysis to determine areas of highest needs (local and state, by academic subject and disability area).

Step 2: Identify Resources

In order to identify existing resources that can be leveraged to support personnel preparation program partnerships, the following items should be considered:

- financial, instructional, and human resources for partnership development;
- technical assistance that may be accessed to provide solutions to local needs;
- plans for implementation and evaluation of the solutions selected and
- infrastructures that already exists to support the selection, implementation, and evaluation of solutions.

Step 3: Determine Personnel Preparation Partnership Components

In developing the components of a preparation program partnership the following steps are recommended:

- identify the personnel preparation goal (number and type of personnel related to local needs);
- secure support for mutual pooling of resources at state and local levels;
- identify major players for creating, implementing and supporting the partnership; and
- identify existing resources of preparation programs that intend to partner.



Step 4: Adapt Preparation Program Model to the Local Setting

It is essential that prep programs be adapted to respond to local needs.

In doing so, partners will need to:

- share existing data on local need and prep program production rate over time;

- provide resources at the local level (financial, institutional, and human) to solidify the partnership through all stages of implementation;
- develop long and short range goals to increase accessibility to local community members;
- determine what additional efforts are needed to reach your “target pool”(i.e., publicize the preparation program partnership in the local community); and
- implement strategies to respond to increased participation in programs by local community members.

Step 5: Emphasize Ongoing Communication

Ongoing communication is the most critical strategy for successful implementation. Consider the following in establishing a communication system that meets all partners’ needs:

- design an on-going communication plan to connect partners with knowledgeable sources and one another;
- provide infrastructure to support communication across numerous venues (phone, internet, face-to-face meetings); and
- develop an environment of trust that facilitates honest feedback and encourages risk-taking.



Through careful planning, collaboration and sharing of resources, personnel preparation program partnerships can go a long way in providing for state and local personnel needs.

The National Center to Improve the Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities (Personnel Improvement Center). A Cooperative Agreement, H325C080001, between the US Department of Education and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

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Addendum: Interviews with a national initiative and two state-supported strategies for personnel preparation program partnership development

Three individuals responded to an invitation during a PIC All State Issue Call to share information about personnel preparation program partnerships. These individuals answered a set of interview questions designed by the PIC to provide practical information for those who would like to add to their understanding of personnel preparation program partnership development.

The featured initiatives and the individuals who shared this information are:

Michigan's Autism Collaborative Endorsement (MI)

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Distance Learning Virginia Speech Language Program - DLV-SLP (VA)

Dr. Pat Aman and Marie Ireland, Virginia Department of Education

Interviewer: Michelle Hopkins, National Recruitment Coordinator- Personnel Improvement Center

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National Center on Deaf Blindness (NCDB)

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Question 1: When did the program begin?

MI - Students were able to register for classes beginning the winter semester of January 2002.

NCDB - The National Consortium on Deaf Blindness Personnel Prep Consortium began July 1, 2008. It was designed and developed for two reasons: a) OSEP felt Personnel Preparation needed attention and b) a focus group of people in the field was held in Chicago, Illinois on March 6-7, 2008. The different individuals that currently serve on the Personnel Prep Consortium had been working together and individually, but had not had the funds to meet regularly.

VA – The DLV-SLP (Distance Learning Virginia Speech Language Program) is in the second year of operation. It is a part time program designed and operated by 5 accredited universities in Virginia with speech-language pathology programs. The first cohort has over 20 students.

Question 2: What type of planning took place before the idea was introduced to the public?

MI - The Department of Education received a state grant from the State Legislature in 2000 to promote Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Programs. Some of the funds were allocated for an on-line autism spectrum disorder additional endorsement on a teaching certificate. One large area of the state was unable to hire any ASD consultants due to a severe shortage. Universities were asked to submit a proposal for the grant funds. The Universities selected became Autism Collaborative Endorsement (ACE).

NCDB - The focus group provided a vehicle for the different university personnel program people to discuss openly the work they were doing and what needed to happen to address the barriers in filling the DB needs. The language for the personnel prep objective and defining the desired outcome were positive results from the focus group process.

The overall Objective is to provide leadership in a coordinated national effort to promote personnel training on the implementation of IDEA and evidence-based practices in order to address the shortage of leadership and highly qualified personnel in the field of deaf-blindness. The desired outcome is to facilitate development of a national personnel training and leadership consortium.

Following the focus group, three meetings have taken place to establish a plan and agenda for the group and fourteen partner colleges and universities were recruited.

VA - It took one year of in-house planning to get the program off the ground. All universities offering speech-language pathology programs met at a retreat. A facilitator was hired by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to help the group determine its purpose, to do list, and action planning after brainstorming areas like funding and curricula. In addition, Dr. Michael Berman of the State Special Education Advisory Committee talked to the group about the lessons learned when a distance learning program in severe disabilities was created. VDOE gave the group start-up funding for the first year for the schools to meet and plan.

Originally, the distance learning program was going to be a free standing program but ASHA, the accrediting body for speech-language pathologists, would not offer accreditation. At that point, each university had to go through the substantive change process required by ASHA.

In addition, all faculty members teaching courses had to go through a training program providing them with techniques for teaching a distance learning format. This included using technology for facilitated discussion and ways to keep the students connected to each other.

Question 3: What did you do to get buy-in from stakeholders?

MI - ACE Universities were able to access grant funds to develop courses; students were given incentives through the grant to enroll.

NCDB - Inviting the different colleges and universities currently doing the work to train new educators, during the March 2007 focus group, opened the door to hearing from the experts and involving them in the planning process.

VA - Universities- In an attempt to get more therapists in the public schools, VDOE gave funds to universities to encourage therapists to work in this setting. They found that it was difficult to track and wanted a more efficient way of spending resources. Universities were told that funding was going to be discontinued for this program and that a new program was going to be started. Universities were given the opportunity to opt into the new distance learning program. Only one university refused the funds.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) – LEAs were in desperate need of therapists so buy-in was assumed by the VDOE.

Question 4: Who was invited to the table to plan?

MI - Parents, institutions of higher education, local and intermediate school districts, and autism experts in the state.

NCDB - All colleges and universities that had personnel programs to prepare teacher educators and leaders to work with deaf blind students.

VA - Universities with approved speech-language programs; VDOE; facilitator; representative from a similar program in Ohio.

LEAs were not invited to the table to plan.

Question 5: Were they the people who could broker resources?

MI - Yes, the stakeholders who helped create ACE influenced the resources.

NCDB - yes

VA - Those that came to planning meeting were not the people who could broker resources. It took additional time for them to go back to go back to their school and secure approval.

Question 6: How did you address the needs of local school districts?

MI - The reason the grant funds were targeted on teacher training was to ensure more endorsed teachers in the area of ASD. Therefore, the local school districts were pleased to know that there would be a new pool of teachers.

NCDB - The NCDB Personnel Prep Consortium members represent colleges and universities across the nation. Each of them works with school districts in their states and through partnerships they have with other states. The Consortium meetings provide the vehicle for conversations to take place across state lines, as well as outside of normal college and university turf areas.

VA - Virginia used its database to determine how many therapists in the school divisions had a provisional license. They knew part-time programs were needed to allow therapists to work full-time in the schools and pursue the necessary coursework to get full licensure. VDOE also knew that the 5 universities typically could only serve a fifty-mile radius and the program had to be statewide accessible.

Question 7: How did you develop a relationship with local school districts? (Who approached whom? What resources did each party bring to the table? Was there resistance?)

MI - The local school districts were part of the stakeholder group invited by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE-EIS) to discuss ASD issues.

NCDB - Please see above.

VA - VDOE did not seek to develop specific relationships with local school districts. It was assumed that statewide initiatives to create more qualified personnel in the schools would meet their shortage needs.

Question 8: How was clinical supervision addressed? (Was it on-site or distance-based?)

MI- Supervision is on-site by the home university.

Each “home university” is responsible for “student teaching” or practicum and provides the supervision of the student teaching or practicum experience.

NCDB - NA

VA - Part-time advisors who were licensed speech-pathologists were hired to help find placements for students needing adult hours and provided supervision on site. Since the students

were already employed in the schools, they could get clinical hours with the student they were already working with and use-video-teleconferencing technology.

Question 9: Were there additional costs (resources or funds contributed) associated with the program?

MI – a. State level – Staff in the MDE OSE-EIS and Professional Preparation Services have provided staff to implement this program and credential teachers in the area of ASD.

b. District level – none

c. University level- Michigan Virtual University – provided technological expertise in coordinating activities for university registration and developing a reimbursement system.

Six original Universities – Provided their own technical support for the on-line courses since the courses were developed new for ACE.

- One university maintained a “Help line” to walk students through the on-line registration process and answer basic ACE questions. Now that the program has been running for a number of years, the help line has been discontinued.

- Provided faculty time and support.

- Two of the original universities have developed their own ASD endorsement programs and are no longer a part of ACE. The ACE program is self-sustaining with tuition and in-kind contributions of MDE and university personnel.

NCDB - The NCDB Personnel Prep Consortium receives funding through NCDB to attend two meetings each year. However the deaf blind circle of experts is so small there are a variety of levels of work that the Consortium members do that is funded through state meetings and university interaction (sharing of research and obstacles/challenges), as well as during the specific NCDB meetings.

VA - State level - VDOE did incur more costs than initially thought because there were underestimates regarding the level of technology needed at the university level.

University level- underestimated the level of technology needed.

Question 10: What challenges had to be overcome? (turfism, finding candidates, technology infrastructure, money, people?)

MI - In the beginning, the ACE had to overcome the individual university barriers to become a collaborative among six universities. The technology infrastructure was not in place. A large hurdle was the university registration infrastructure. The ACE universities and MDE worked with the Michigan Virtual University in creating the registration process and receipt of payment for the courses. MVU continues to administer this function. The individual faculty at the table promoted this program to their own administration. It was not an easy task and their belief in creating this collaborative was a major component in convincing the institutions of higher education that this is a win-win for the state and the individual universities. This was a challenging endeavor.

NCDB - The NCDB Personnel Prep Consortium has assisted making conversations and sharing of programs and syllabi easier because the different program people can sit down face-to-face together to discuss and share in addressing common concerns, challenges, and student exchanges.

VA - It was challenging getting the ASHA to approve the concept of distance learning. The schools had to show how they were meeting the ASHA standards. Although the curriculum could be interchangeable at the 5 universities for the distance learning program, entrance criteria of the individual colleges were different. So it was possible that people who had to meet less rigorous standards were in the same class with someone who had tougher entrance criteria to meet. The SEA has to decide if they are going to require participation or allow programs to opt to participate.

Question 11: What advice would you give states that want to implement a similar design?

MI - It is possible to build a collaborative but not easy. It takes effort and willingness for bureaucracies to see ways around set practices. One of the university members had an “on-ground” endorsement program when this idea was proposed. Their willingness to share their experience and not be territorial was a huge asset to making the collaborative successful.

NCDB - Deaf blindness is a small field which requires patience; face-to-face relationship building; and a willingness to be innovative in the approaches to working together across boundaries and barriers.

VA - SEA needs to have an expert on the type of program being implemented (speech, vision, etc.) and an expert on the parameters of budgeting. Spend at least a year planning. Let stakeholders participate at the level of their capacity. For example, one school only had an undergraduate program in speech pathology but they could be a feeder school to a university at the graduate level.

Question 12: How many students have finished the program?

MI - 175 students have received their ASD Endorsement.

NCDB - The number of students across the nation that are committed to DB education expertise whether that transfers as a certificate, Masters, and/or Doctorate is a small group of people. The opportunities to be trained in a small field such as deaf blindness means the numbers are small and it is very state dependent. We are beginning to gather information about DB research and DB doctoral candidates in order to be a research broker as well as an avenue to help with scholarship and mentoring information.

VA - The first cohort has not graduated yet.