

Professional Development Network Q & A

What is the Professional Development Network?

To build state-wide capacity for implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs), the state must identify a network of training and technical assistance professionals who will be responsible for providing training, technical assistance, and program coaching to sites, practitioner coaches, and practitioners.

The network might include professionals who currently are in training and technical assistance (T/TA) roles, or the state might identify and allocate the resources to establish this group of T/TA providers. The network could include specialists who focus on the delivery of specific elements of the T/TA services (e.g., training). However, professionals who will specialize in only one element in their service provision must participate in all training events to ensure deep exposure to the model and an understanding of all elements related to implementation.

The professional development network will be involved in both training and program coaching to implementation sites¹ and professionals. Because the professional development network will be working directly with practitioners and programs, they will be in a critical position to bring information about local implementation to the State Leadership Team (SLT). They will have knowledge about the capacity of practitioners and programs, the barriers to implementation that are being encountered, and the supports needed by practitioners and programs. In addition, they will be critical partners in the delivery of the state's efforts toward implementation. Thus, the SLT should establish a communication mechanism for obtaining feedback from the network and working formally with the network while the infrastructure for delivering professional development is refined.

How are Network Members selected?

Members of the professional development network should have the background, knowledge, experiences, and time needed for this critical role in the statewide implementation process. Other factors that might be considered in the selection of network members are the desire to achieve geographic representation or to ensure that members are included who can bring specialized knowledge that might be needed (e.g., ability to work with tribal programs, expertise in Part C).

The knowledge, skills, and experiences that will be important for network members are:

- Educational experiences including coursework in EC education or a related field
- Experiences working with young children (with and without special needs) and their families
- Experiences leading or participating on collaborative teams
- Experiences providing technical assistance across diverse EC settings

¹ Implementation sites refer to the programs that are selected for the implementation of EBPs. Programs might be an early childhood center program, Part C provider agency, public school early childhood classrooms that are part of a district program, Head Start center, or other entities that provide services to children birth to five that are supported by IDEA. Programs must have administrative leadership that provides guidance and supervision related to the professional practices that are used by practitioners within the program.

- Experiences in providing consultation to classrooms and/or coaching to practitioners
- Skills and experiences in providing training to early educators and early interventionists
- Knowledge of EBPs and their application in providing intervention and supports to young children and their families receiving IDEA services.

Professional development network members are typically selected through an application process (see sample recruitment announcement and application packet). The use of an application is desirable, even if your recruitment is from an existing technical-assistance system, as it provides the team with an opportunity to be explicit about the initiative and the commitment necessary to become a professional development network member who is focused on the implementation of your selected EBPs.

Prior to releasing the application for potential network members, the State Leadership Team should consider the following issues and determine how the professional development network will be used within the state. The answers to these questions should be determined before inviting applications:

- What is the time commitment for the network member? How many hours will a member need to commit each month and for how many years?
- How will network members be supported to do this work? Will agencies commit these resources and provide the role release for members or will new resources be identified?
- Will you seek geographic representation of network members? Will you seek other specializations for your professional development network?
- Will formal agreements be needed with current employers to support the work of network members?
- Who will serve in a role as coordinator for the professional development network? The coordinator will be needed to organize the work, make assignments for training and program technical assistance, and serve as the link between the SLT and the members of the professional development network.

Typically, the SLT will designate a committee to manage the selection of network members. They will develop the application, determine the application-process steps, and score applications. After applications are scored the committee selects the members.

How will the Professional Development Network support programs and professionals?

The network will be the training and technical-assistance providers who form the foundation of the state's cross-sector, integrated, professional-development effort. The focus of the network will be to promote program-wide implementation by the implementation sites. Program-wide implementation is essential to implementation fidelity as it ensures that programs have the capacity to support the implementation of EBPs. This is essential to the effort of the state to achieve implementation and intervention fidelity that will optimize child and family outcomes. In this role, a member of the network will serve as a program coach to the site's implementation leadership team. A program coach guides the team in establishing staff buy-in, promoting family engagement, using practitioner and program-implementation fidelity tools, ensuring practitioner/professional development and coaching, designing a system to provide assessment-based individualized interventions to children with intensive learning needs, and

using data to guide the team's decisions about implementation and outcomes.


What Supports Are Needed for the Professional Development Network?

The State Leadership Team should ensure that the network is guided by a coordinator who provides leadership for the activities of the network. The coordinator will also serve as a communication link to the SLT. To ensure that the network can work efficiently, it will be critical that they have access to technology for communication (e.g., conference calls, web-supported calls) and file sharing (e.g., shared drive, file-share system). In addition, the network will need to have support for promoting and offering training events (e.g., space, materials, registration systems, continuing education credit, evaluation, etc.) and the recruitment and support of implementation sites (e.g., recruitment, travel reimbursement, materials, etc.).

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