

Core Knowledge and Competencies Planning and Implementation Guide

National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives (PDW Center)
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This resource is a planning and implementation guide for State and Territory teams as they develop or revise and then implement core knowledge and competencies (CKCs). It also describes an aligned State and Territory professional development system (PDS), and defines CKCs as a foundational part of an aligned PDS. The provided considerations are built on a readiness for change process framework, with four steps for developing or revising and implementing CKCs that focus on goal or outcome development, fit and feasibility and readiness for change, implementation, and monitoring.

“Readiness” is defined as a developmental point at which a person, organization, or system has the capacity and willingness to engage in a particular activity. Creating readiness for change is a critical component of both initiating and scaling up the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations. Proceeding with implementation prematurely (i.e., before an individual or an organization is “ready” to change) can lead to both ineffective and expensive implementation efforts. **“Readiness for change”** is something that needs to be developed, nurtured, and sustained. Accountability for creating readiness rests with the implementation team, not with those who are expected or invited to change (Fixsen, Blase, Horner & Sugai, 2009).

This guide is for the full range of policymakers and other leaders that contribute to building, enhancing, and administering aligned PDS, specifically including:

- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrators and staff;
- Head Start State Collaboration Directors, Head Start training coordinators, large Head Start grantees, and other Head Start Leaders;
- Early Childhood (EC) Specialists in State Departments of Education, Early Intervention and Special Education Professional Development (PD) and Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinators, and other leaders in State Departments of Education;
- Representatives from Boards of Regents or higher education boards;
- PDS administrators;
- Child care resource and referral administrators, training organization directors and trainers, higher education institution administrators and EC or child development faculty, TA organization administrators and providers;
- Head Start, Child Care, and other EC and school-age (SA) professional association administrators and staff; and
- Other EC, SA and youth development leaders, and key partners.

This guide is presented in three sections:

- I. [Overview of Aligned PDS](#);
- II. [Core Knowledge and Competencies Definition](#); and
- III. [Considerations for Developing or Revising and Implementing Core Knowledge and Competencies](#).

I. Overview of Aligned PDS

State and Territory aligned PDS consist of interrelated efforts, services, and supports that address the continuum of workforce needs with a common goal of building and sustaining an effective workforce. PDS include education, training, and TA.

As States and Territories work to build aligned PDS, there are an increasing number and variety of stakeholders to consider across:

- Roles—direct service professionals and those who work on behalf of young children and their families;
- Settings—centers, schools, and homes;
- Sectors—Child Care, Head Start or Early Head Start, public preschool /primary education, and early intervention/special education; and
- Related systems—family support, health, and mental health.

Exactly which sectors and systems comprise a State and Territory’s vision for an aligned PDS depends on its context, including its political and fiscal situation, where and how the PDS fits in its larger early learning and EC systems, and its specific PD goals and priorities. A State and Territory’s context can dictate the best approach(es) for successful alignment efforts.

II. Core Knowledge and Competencies Definition

Core knowledge and competencies (CKCs) refers to the expectations for what the workforce should know (content) and be able to do (skills) in their role working with and/or on behalf of children and their families. These CKCs provide a foundation for professional development design including instructional practices and other quality improvement efforts. (*CCDF Plan Preprint FY 2012-2013, Part 3.4.1*)

Comprehensive PDS are built on the foundation of professional standards that delineate CKCs for the workforce. All EC and SA professionals need the central knowledge and skills described in CKCs, at a minimum, to adequately perform their roles. Various roles, settings, and sectors may require additional *specializations* of knowledge and skills for professionals to be most effective.

III. Considerations for Developing or Revising and Implementing Core Knowledge and Competencies

The following considerations are built on a readiness for change process framework that emphasizes the need to understand the context in which a systems-level initiative is planned and implemented. Many of the issues and considerations addressed in this tool are interrelated and reflect the complexity of developing components of an aligned PDS. Using this tool to support planning and implementation will be most successful if the State and Territory can designate a team and timeline for working through each of the steps. It is important to devote adequate time and resources for the decision-making and implementation planning. While effective systems change typically takes place over a number of years, establishing incremental steps and progress indicators can help maintain momentum and ultimately

achieve the desired goal(s). It will likely take more than one work session for a planning and implementation team to review and discuss each step. Before using these considerations, the team should determine if any of these steps have already been started or completed.

The considerations are organized in four suggested steps:

1. [Develop or refine the goal and outcomes](#);
2. [Determine the fit and feasibility and readiness for change](#);
3. [Select an approach and develop an implementation plan](#); and
4. [Implement the plan and monitor results](#).

Step 1: Develop or Refine the Goals and Outcomes

Purpose: Define the goal and outcomes as concretely as possible.

- **What do we want to achieve by developing or revising and implementing CKCs?**
- **How are CKCs defined? What is our vision for CKCs in our State and Territory?**
- **What are the articulated goals and outcomes for CKCs and their use in PD and quality improvement of the EC and SA workforce?**
- **Is there sufficient buy-in and consensus in the State and Territory regarding those goals? If not, is there a vehicle or body that can help develop consensus?**
- **Which stakeholders should be involved in any revision or fine-tuning of State and Territory goals and policy to develop or refine and implement CKCs?**
 - ◆ Does the State and Territory have access to these vehicles, bodies, or stakeholders?
 - ◆ If not, which partners could engage the needed stakeholders?
- **How can this effort be used to unify the field?**
- **If we are revising CKCs, has there been substantial change in the research since the last CKCs were developed?**
- **How will we measure success?**

Step 2: Determine the Fit and Feasibility and Readiness for Change

Conduct a fit and feasibility analysis to determine what combination of policies and allocation of resources is most likely to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. The purpose of a fit and feasibility analysis is to examine an array of options and assess the degree to which each option (or package of options) could be successfully implemented in the State and Territory. The components of a fit and feasibility analysis include:

- *Identification and Validation of Need*—questions for initial considerations; and
- *Consideration of Required Changes*—key questions for in-depth considerations that create readiness for change.

Identification and Validation of Need

Purpose: Ensure that PDS stakeholders understand the TA needs and are committed to capacity building and successful implementation.

- **Is there consensus that CKCs need to be developed or revised?**
- **How will the CKCs fit in the professional development system?**
 - ◆ Foundational knowledge
 - ◆ Framing for community-based training, higher education courses, approval, tracking, etc.
 - ◆ Relationship to career pathway and credentials
 - ◆ Specializations
 - ◆ Articulation links (including with national criteria and State and Territory certifications)
- **How will CKCs be used across settings and sectors, and fit with other related systems and other quality improvement efforts?**
 - ◆ **Settings:** Settings are where services are provided, including direct and non-direct service programs, organizations, agencies, etc. Settings and their administration often cross multiple EC and SA sectors, and increasingly they cross related systems. They also can and often do have a combination of characteristics listed below.
 - Public and private
 - Profit and non-profit
 - Faith-based
 - Community-based
 - School-based
 - Home-based
 - Employer sponsored
 - Licensing requirements
 - ◆ **Sectors:** The EC and SA system is composed of sectors. Their discrete funding streams, regulations, and requirements delineate sectors. Because early intervention and special education services cross and serve multiple sectors, they are sometimes described as part of each of these sectors and sometimes described as separate systems. However, for the purposes of discussing and framing intentional PDS integration, they are defined in this guide as EC and SA primary sectors to underscore their importance as well as their discrete professional preparation and development history, delivery, and requirements. The EC and SA primary sectors include:
 - Child Care
 - Head Start/Early Head Start
 - Public preschool/primary education
 - Early intervention/Special education
 - ◆ **Related Systems:** Systems that are related to and overlap with the EC and SA system include family support which may provide parenting education, home visiting, economic supports, and other services; and health and mental health which may provide preventative care, screenings, and supports to access health providers, as well as instructional support.
 - ◆ **Quality Improvement Efforts:** PDS are an integral part of other quality improvement efforts in States and Territories. These efforts may include:
 - Licensing
 - Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)

- State and Territory system building initiatives and plans (CCDF, State Early Childhood Advisory Council, Head Start, State Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grants, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, etc.)
- **Will the CKCs target any specific populations or are there and any planned specializations? What are the unique needs of the infant toddler and SA community for CKCs?**
 - ◆ Roles
 - ◆ Age ranges
 - ◆ Settings
 - ◆ Sectors
 - ◆ Related systems
 - ◆ Levels of proficiency and mastery
- **Are there adjustments to be made in order to include all or targeted populations? Will any unique elements be embedded in a universal document, or will there be a set of specialized knowledge and competencies for any targeted roles such as the infant toddler or SA workforce?**
- **How will it “fit” with community values, including the values of diverse cultural groups?**

Consideration of Required Changes

Purpose: Identify the specific system components, governance, political, financial, and sustainability issues that are needed to develop or revise and implement CKCs.

- **What organization(s) are best positioned to implement, grow, and sustain the use of CKCs?**
- **How can periodic review of the CKCs and their use be insured?**
- **How can law, regulations, policy, and guidance be used to support the CKCs as the foundation of an aligned EC and SA PD systems?**
 - ◆ Incorporate CKCs into next revision of licensing law and/or regulations as a basis for PD requirements? Require preservice qualifications and/or ongoing PD to be distributed across the CKCs content areas?
 - ◆ Develop policies that require the use of CKCs as a basis for approved training, curriculum, and/or credentials?
 - ◆ Provide guidance on the assessment and approval of distance learning courses?
 - ◆ Provide guidance on the use of the CKCs as the foundation for Individual professional development plans (IPDPs) and career advisement?
 - ◆ Other ways?
- **What funding is required to complete this work?**
 - ◆ What are sources of funding?
- **Are there overarching issues to be addressed, such as dispositions or cultural diversity?**
- **Are there specific content areas that need to be addressed, e.g., supporting healthy weight, management skills?**
- **Do the CKCs specifically address the importance of early experiences and their impact on later development?**
- **Do the CKCs address helping families engage with their children?**
- **Do the CKCs address brain development and the importance of relationships?**

- Do the CKCs address relationships as the context for learning, especially in the first three years, as well as for older children?
- How will CKCs be used and what changes will need to be made?
 - ◆ By systems
 - ◆ By those providing PD, including faculty
 - ◆ By EC and SA direct service staff
 - ◆ By EC and SA staff working on behalf of young children
- How will the CKCs be distributed?
- What training and supports are needed?
 - ◆ How will training on the CKCs *and* how to implement them be included?
- How will the CKCs be aligned into the training approval process?
- How will CKCs be aligned into course development?
- What processes are available or needed to assess competency acquisition?
 - ◆ What resources are available to support assessment?
- How will the link between the CKCs and early learning guidelines be emphasized?
- Do credentials or career pathway levels need to be revised based on changes to CKCs?
- What career advising resources are available? Do they need to be revised?

Step 3: Select an Approach and Develop an Implementation Plan

Select an approach and develop the implementation plan based on considerations in steps 1 and 2. Confirm the approach to developing or revising and implementing CKCs by delineating the targeted settings, sectors, related systems, and goals. A successful implementation plan will address management of changes in the system, communications, regular review and monitoring, and data collection and reporting. Described below are key elements and questions to guide the design of an implementation plan.

Planning for Change

Purpose: Prepare for implementation by ensuring that roles and responsibilities for implementing a new approach are clear and agreed upon by stakeholders.

- Where is the authority to create and implement the CKCs located?
- What cross-agency agreements will need to be in place?
- How will the work be done?
- Who will manage the work?
- What is the time frame?
- What is currently in place to support the work?
- What TA is available?

- **How can alignment be ensured with:**
 - ◆ Other parts of the PD system? (credentials, career pathways, access, capacity, workforce data)?
 - ◆ Other quality improvement efforts and standards (e.g., licensing, national standards, QRIS, early learning guidelines, etc.)?
 - ◆ Higher education courses and programs?
- **Who should be involved in the development?**
 - ◆ What sectors?
 - ◆ What are the barriers to involving multiple sectors and can the challenges be overcome?
 - ◆ What roles and specialized areas – adult educators, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, infant toddler, SA, special needs/early intervention, schools, etc.?
 - ◆ Authors of already existing professional standards?
- **How will the CKCs be developed?**
 - ◆ By writing teams or by a single editor or writer?
 - ◆ If teams are used, how will they be formed?
 - ◆ Will there be writing and research guides and ground rules?
 - ◆ What is the timeframe for development or revisions?
 - ◆ How will national standards and criteria be used?
- **What will be included?**
 - ◆ Purpose
 - ◆ Rationales
 - ◆ Research
 - ◆ Usage guide
 - ◆ IPDPs
 - ◆ System mapping
 - ◆ Levels
 - ◆ Credentials

Communication Plan

Purpose: Develop an intentional communication and marketing strategy to support implementation.

- **Who needs to know about the CKCs initiative, what do they need to know and how will communication be conducted?**
 - ◆ Various professionals across settings, sectors, and systems
 - ◆ Policymakers
 - ◆ Partners
 - ◆ Professionals working directly with young children and their families
 - ◆ Program directors or administrators
 - ◆ Training and TA providers
 - ◆ Higher education faculty and administrators
- **What information products are needed for which audiences?**
- **How will feedback be solicited and collected from all potential users on drafts of the document?**

Implementation Team

Purpose: Support implementation by creating roles and responsibilities and a plan for regular monitoring of activities. (Also see Step 4. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)

- **Who should be on the Implementation Team to guide implementation and ongoing monitoring of the approach and plans?**
- **What infrastructure is needed at the State and Territory level to support the comprehensive approach? What leadership is needed?**
- **What staff is available to coordinate this work?**
- **What training and supervision will staff need to coordinate this work?**
- **What work plan will be developed, and who will oversee the activities in the work plan?**

Data Collection and Reporting Plan

Purpose: Develop a data plan to support implementation and reporting of progress to funders and to the Implementation Team. (Also see Step 4. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)

- **How will the State and Territory monitor the plan's implementation?**
- **What indicators of successful implementation will be collected over time? What data is needed?**
 - ◆ Staff trained on core knowledge?
 - ◆ Staff assessed on competencies?
 - ◆ Training and courses aligned with CKCs?
 - ◆ CKCs use?
 - ◆ CKCs integration into the PDS?
 - ◆ Other?
- **Who will the data include and how will it be used?**
 - ◆ Data on the workforce in all settings and sectors?
 - ◆ Data on the workforce in related systems?
 - ◆ What reports are needed for whom and when?
 - ◆ Will data be shared with licensing?
 - ◆ Will data be shared with the QRIS?
- **What capacity exists to collect, house, and analyze data? Are there linkages with a unified data system that supports early learning goals?**
- **What existing data systems (registries, licensing, child care assistance, education) could be used?**
- **What new data systems, linkages, or tracking capacity may need to be established?**
- **How can cross-sector or system privacy issues be addressed?**
- **What capacity exists for developing regular reporting that can inform the Implementation Team?**
- **How will data be used to inform decision-making? When will plans be reviewed and adjusted (as needed)?**

Step 4: Implement the Plan and Monitor Results

An implementation plan should be developed after the State and Territory team has worked through the considerations outlined in steps 2 and 3. The implementation plan will assign roles and responsibilities for implementation and outline a timeline for the process. To the extent possible, the implementation plan should build on the information gathered to date by developing action steps that will guide implementation. The implementation plan should also outline how feedback and data will be used to ensure that implementation is proceeding as planned. Key elements of monitoring an implementation plan and questions to guide this continuous improvement process are described below.

Checking In

Purpose: Develop a process for checking in on implementation activities to date.

- **How will the State and Territory collect information about the progress of implementation activities to date?**
- **How will the State and Territory receive feedback from key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the CKCs, as well as from the recipients of the efforts?**
- **What process will be used to gather information from evaluation efforts, data systems, and regular reporting from key implementers to inform adjustments needed?**

Evaluating

Purpose: Develop a process to reflect upon current implementation activities to determine changes needed to meet implementation goals.

- **Who will be responsible for reflecting upon the information gathered through the established check-in processes? Which stakeholders need to be involved?**
- **How often should the feedback gathered through monitoring processes be considered?**
- **What process will the State and Territory use to evaluate feedback from multiple monitoring activities to make decisions about adjustments to the implementation plan?**

Making Adjustments

Purpose: Develop a process for adjusting current implementation activities based upon successes and challenges identified in the current implementation plan.

- **What threshold will the State and Territory use to determine that the evidence collected points to a need to adjust or modify implementation activities?**
- **How will the State and Territory implement modifications to the CKCs implementation plans or activities?**
- **What parts of the implementation process will need to be revisited to make adjustments? For example, will the adjustment require a new communication plan, or an invitation to new stakeholders?**
- **What process will the State and Territory use to ensure that modifications have led to a stronger implementation plan?**

Reference

Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (February, 2009). Scaling-up Brief. *State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices*. FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Retrieved from <http://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/>