

# Distance Learning 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/Territory teams as they develop and strengthen distance learning (DL) options as part of an aligned professional development system (PDS). The guide provides considerations built on a readiness for change process framework, with five steps focused on scanning existing initiatives and investments, goal/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/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 early education, SA and youth development leaders, and key partners.

State/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/Territories work to build and strengthen DL offerings within their 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/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/Territory's vision for DL initiatives within their 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/Territory's context can dictate the best approach(es) for successful alignment efforts.

The guide is organized in five suggested steps:

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

Policymakers and leaders will be most successful in using this guide to support planning and implementation if they designate a State/Territory team and a timeline for working through each of the steps. It is important to devote adequate time and resources for this decisionmaking 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). Before using these considerations, the team should determine if any of these steps are in progress or completed.

## Step 1. Conduct a Scan of Current Initiatives and Expenditures Related to DL Offerings for the EC and SA Workforce

To inform policy decisions, the State/Territory planning and implementation team should begin with a systematic scan of existing EC and SA workforce data and current investments across the PDS. The team can use the results of the scan to understand the status of current investments and approaches and to identify gaps. This scan should target three key components: basic data on the workforce, funding level and sources, and alignment of current initiatives. The purpose of addressing each component and the questions that establish baseline estimates are described in the sections that follow.

### *Collection of Basic Data on the Workforce and Existing DL Options*

*Purpose: Identify workforce needs, access to DL, and current DL offerings.*

- **What are the EC and SA workforce’s training and education needs?**
  - ◆ Are there differences across the following areas?
    - Roles—direct service professionals and those who work on behalf of young children and their families;
    - Settings—centers, schools, and homes; or
    - Sectors—Child Care, Head Start/Early Head Start, public preschool/primary education, and early intervention/special education?
  - ◆ Are there differences by age group of children in care (e.g., infant/toddler (IT), preschool, or SA)?
  
- **What languages are spoken in the workforce? What are the implications for access to training and coursework?**
  
- **Are there projected education and training needs for PD based on changes in regulations for staff qualifications and ongoing PD, policies, demand, or changing demographics?**
  - ◆ Which of these needs are being met or could most appropriately be met by DL offerings?
  - ◆ Who is the target audience for DL?
  
- **Are any State/Territory- or community-level data available related to the current DL courses accessed by the EC and SA workforce?**
  - ◆ What is known about workforce access to the Internet and computer equipment?
    - Are there areas, communities, or cultural groups that lack access?
    - Do the target audiences have access to necessary equipment and Internet services to access DL?
  
- **Who or what entities are offering DL for the EC and SA workforce?**
  - ◆ Are they within the State/Territory?
    - Are they available to anyone in the State/Territory or only to certain populations?
  - ◆ Are they outside the State/Territory?
    - Are they available to anyone in the State/Territory or only to certain populations?
    - Are these accessible to people in the State/Territory?
    - Are there issues associated with paying for out-of-State courses?
    - Are there any cross-State agreements for online offerings?

- **Who or what entities are using technology to support or enhance courses, training, and TA?**
- **What types of courses are offered via DL?**
  - ◆ What core knowledge and competencies are covered by existing DL courses?
  - ◆ What gaps in core knowledge and competencies are evident?
- **Who is eligible for these courses (e.g., IT teachers, prekindergarten teachers, SA staff, directors, family child care providers)?**
- **When and how are courses offered (e.g., on demand, scheduled start and end points, asynchronous, cohorts, learning communities)?**
- **What constitutes quality in DL?**
  - ◆ How is quality DL ensured (e.g., State/Territory policies, regional accrediting bodies, institutional policies, alignment with best practices, such as those practices identified by the Quality Matters™ Rubric and Sloan-C Scorecard)?
  - ◆ What unique qualifications or skills do instructors using DL need to have in addition to expert content knowledge?

### ***Identification of Funding Levels and Sources***

*Purpose: Establish a detailed map of system investments and options for repackaging investments to achieve desired goals.*

- **What are the unique costs associated with offering DL? Consider the following:**
  - ◆ Equipment;
  - ◆ Development;
  - ◆ Maintenance;
  - ◆ Orientation and ongoing training for instructors; and
  - ◆ Technical support.
- **What Federal, State/Territory, and local funding sources are currently used to pay for initiatives that support access to training and education for the EC and SA workforce?**
- **What percentage of current investments has been targeted to access degrees or credentials?**
- **What percentage of current investments has been targeted to inservice training aligned with an individual PD plan or program improvement plan?**
- **What is the current funding level for each initiative, and has it changed in the past 5 years? Does the State/Territory expect any changes in the level of funding in the next budget cycle?**
- **Can these sources of revenue be maintained to sustain DL offerings?**

### ***Examination of the Current Alignment of DL Options into PDS***

*Purpose: Examine how existing DL offerings are part of the PDS and support movement along a career lattice over time.*

- **Is content in current DL options based on or does it align with the State's/Territory's core knowledge and competencies?**
- **How are DL courses approved?**
- **What criteria are currently used to calculate DL hours?**
- **Are there limits to the number of DL hours that can meet any/all qualifications and/or ongoing PD requirements?**
- **Do available DL options currently align with the training/education levels or requirements on the career lattice?**

## **Step 2. Develop or Refine the Goals and Outcomes**

In this step, the State/Territory planning and implementation team can review the outcomes of the scan. They can assess the degree to which current approaches are (or are not) meeting their expectations and work toward clarification of the goals and desired outcomes for the workforce.

### ***Development of Goals and Outcomes***

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

- **How is DL defined? What is our vision for DL in our State/Territory?**
- **What do we want to achieve by developing/revising and integrating DL into the PDS?**
- **What are the articulated goals and outcomes for DL initiatives and their use in PD and quality improvement of the EC and SA workforce?**
- **Is there sufficient buy-in and consensus 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 goals and policy to develop/refine and implement DL initiatives?**
  - ◆ Does the State/Territory planning and implementation team have access to these vehicles, bodies, or stakeholders?
  - ◆ If not, which partners could engage the needed stakeholders?
- **How can this DL effort be used to unify the field?**
- **Has there been substantial change in the research since the current DL options were developed?**

- **Why are DL options needed? What additional evidence is needed to promote an understanding of the need for DL options?**
- **How will we measure success?**
- **Who will the DL initiatives target/prioritize?**

### Step 3. Determine the Fit and Feasibility and Readiness to 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/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 DL needs and are committed to an aligned approach and successful implementation.*

- **Is there consensus that DL opportunities need to be developed or improved, and for what purposes? Which of the following stakeholders need to provide consensus for development/improvement?**
  - ◆ Systems (EC and SA, health, mental health, parent education/family support, home visiting, etc.);
  - ◆ Sectors (Child Care, Head Start, early intervention, etc.);
  - ◆ Workforce;
  - ◆ DL providers; or
  - ◆ Other users or providers (such as employers, other quality improvement systems or initiatives, etc.).
- **How does/will DL fit in the PDS? Consider the following:**
  - ◆ Use with or link to community-based training;
  - ◆ Use with or link to higher education courses;
  - ◆ Relationship to career pathway and credentials; and
  - ◆ Approval and tracking in a workforce data system, such as a registry.

- **How can DL be used across settings, sectors, other related systems, and other quality improvement efforts?**
  - ◆ **Settings:** Settings are where services are provided, including direct and non-direct service programs, organizations, agencies. Settings and their administration often cross multiple EC and SA sectors, and increasingly, they cross related systems. They can also and often do have a combination of the following characteristics:
    - Public and private;
    - Profit and nonprofit;
    - Faith-based;
    - Community-based;
    - School-based;
    - Home-based;
    - Employer-sponsored;
    - Military; and
    - Licensed and license-exempt.
  - ◆ **Sectors:** The EC and SA system is composed of sectors. Sectors are delineated by their discrete funding streams, regulations, and requirements. 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 alignment, this guide defines them 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; and
    - Early intervention/special education.
  - ◆ **Related Systems:** Systems that are related to and overlap with the EC and SA systems include family support (which may provide parenting education, home visiting, economic supports, and other services) and health and mental health services (which may provide preventive 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/Territories. These efforts may include the following:
    - Licensing;
    - Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS); and
    - State/Territory system-building initiatives/plans (Child Care Development Fund, State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care, Head Start, State Early Childhood Comprehensive System grants, Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting grants, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, etc.).
- **Is there agreement on the target audience for the DL options in the following areas?**
  - ◆ Roles;
  - ◆ Age ranges;
  - ◆ Settings;
  - ◆ Sectors; and
  - ◆ Related systems.

- **What are the unique needs of those providing the DL?**
- **What are the unique needs of the IT and SA community for DL offerings?**
- **How will DL "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 improve and implement DL offerings.*

- **What organization(s) are best positioned to implement, grow, and sustain the DL initiative?**
- **What national data might be used to inform decisions about using DL as an option for meeting current training and education requirements?**
- **How can law, regulations, policy, and guidance be used to support the DL initiative in the following areas?**
  - ◆ Developing policies that include the use of DL in approved training, TA, and/or credentials;
  - ◆ Providing guidance on the assessment and approval of DL courses;
  - ◆ Providing guidance on the use of the DL for individual PD planning and career advisement; or
  - ◆ Other ways.
- **What reallocations of investments, changes in policies, QRIS or licensing standards, or contracts for services are needed to develop or advance DL initiatives?**
  - ◆ Will DL options be accepted by and referenced in child care licensing regulations?
  - ◆ Will DL options be acceptable and referenced in QRIS levels?
  - ◆ How will DL offerings be included in the training approval process?
- **What funding is required to complete this work?**
  - ◆ What are sources of funding?
  - ◆ What is the potential to garner additional income from or to sustain funding for expanded DL offerings?
- **Is the technology needed to create quality DL available?**
- **How can social media be used to enhance the DL experience?**
- **How will the DL be provided?**
  - ◆ What supports are needed to fully implement DL courses?
  - ◆ Will DL offerings be available for college credit, to meet specific preservice requirements, for orientation, or for inservice requirements?
  - ◆ Do the targeted audiences have the equipment and Internet access necessary to have a successful learning experience?
  - ◆ Do specific populations need to be addressed (e.g., IT, SA)?

- ◆ Do specific content areas need to be addressed in line with the State/Territory core knowledge and competencies (e.g., basic child development, management skills)?
- **How will DL options 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; and
  - ◆ By EC and SA support staff working on behalf of young children.
- **What processes are available or needed to assess competency acquisition?**
  - ◆ How will learning outcomes be measured?
  - ◆ What resources are available to support assessment?
- **How will various requirements that apply to different sectors/settings be aligned?**
- **What are the potential barriers to offering DL options across the State/Territory?**

### Step 4. Select an Approach and Develop an Implementation Plan

In this step, the planning and implementation team selects an approach and develops the implementation plan based on considerations in Steps 1 through 3. The team confirms the approach by delineating the targeted settings, sectors, related systems, and goals to align specific components or the overall PDS. A successful implementation plan will address the management of changes in the system, communications, regular review and monitoring, and data collection and reporting. Key elements of an implementation plan and questions to guide the planning are described below.

#### *Planning for Change*

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

- **Where is the authority to develop and implement DL offerings? What partnerships are needed to support use of DL offerings across sectors?**
  - ◆ 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 across the following areas?**
  - ◆ The PDS (core knowledge and competencies, credentials, career pathways, access, capacity, workforce data);
  - ◆ Higher education courses and programs; and
  - ◆ Other quality improvement efforts and standards (e.g., licensing, national standards, QRIS, early learning guidelines, etc.).

- **Who should be involved in the development and/or continuous improvement?**
  - ◆ Which sectors and related systems should be involved?
  - ◆ What are the barriers to involving multiple sectors/related systems and can the challenges be overcome?
  - ◆ What roles and specialized areas are involved (e.g., adult educators, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, technology specialists, special needs/early intervention specialists, schools, etc.)?
  - ◆ What role will higher education have in meeting the need for DL options?
  - ◆ Which members of already existing State/Territory or local advisory or planning groups will need to be included?
  - ◆ Which entities regulate or approve qualifications and ongoing PD requirements?
  - ◆ Should developers of already existing DL offerings be involved?
  
- **How will DL options be developed or advanced?**
  - ◆ With a foundation of a mission and vision? With guiding principles?
  - ◆ By developing a conceptual design?
  - ◆ Will/how will national standards/criteria be used?
  - ◆ By leads, workgroups, teams?
  - ◆ By existing DL providers?
  - ◆ What is the time frame for development, revision, or expansion?
  
- **What entity is qualified and able to monitor, approve, and evaluate DL training and education?**

### **Communication Plan**

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

- **Who of the following needs to know about DL options, development, and continuous improvement?**
  - ◆ Representatives of each setting, sector, and related systems;
  - ◆ Policymakers;
  - ◆ Partners;
  - ◆ Professionals working directly with young children and their families;
  - ◆ Program directors/administrators;
  - ◆ Training and TA providers;
  - ◆ Higher education faculty and administrators;
  - ◆ Professional associations;
  - ◆ Unions;
  - ◆ DL developers;
  - ◆ DL approvers; and
  - ◆ Others.
  
- **What do they need to know, and how will communication be conducted?**
  
- **Which information products are needed for which audiences?**

- How will stakeholders' feedback be solicited, collected, and incorporated?

### **Implementation Team**

*Purpose: Support implementation by creating roles and responsibilities for members of an implementation team and a plan for regular monitoring of activities. (Also see Step 5. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)*

- Who should be on the implementation team to guide implementation and the ongoing monitoring of the approach and plans?
- What infrastructure is needed at the State/Territory and local levels 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 the reporting of progress to funders and to the implementation team. (Also see Step 5. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results.)*

- How will the State/Territory team monitor the plan's implementation?
- What indicators of successful implementation will be collected over time?
- What capacity exists to collect, house, and analyze data? What existing data systems (e.g., registries, licensing, Head Start Program Information Report, child care assistance, education) could be used?
- What new data systems, linkages, or tracking capacity may need to be established?
- How can cross-sector/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 decisionmaking?
- Is an evaluator in place who can conduct an analysis to determine if the comprehensive approach is improving DL offerings and impacting workforce quality?

## Step 5. Implement the Plan and Monitor Results

In this step, the planning and implementation team assigns tasks and timelines, monitors results, and makes system adjustments as needed. Implementation occurs through assigned roles and responsibilities for specific action steps and a timeline for completion as considered in Steps 1–4. To the extent possible, the implementation plan should build on the information gathered to date and use the results garnered through Step 4 of the considerations. Results from the data collection and monitoring of implementation inform revisions or modifications to activities. Appropriate selection of staff, ongoing TA, and analysis of data to inform decisions can support this process of continuous improvement and help the State/Territory planning and implementation team reflect on lessons learned as the approach is implemented and the PDS matures.

### Checking In

*Purpose: Develop a process for checking in on the progress of implementation activities to date.*

- **How will the State/Territory team collect information about the progress of implementation activities to date?**
- **How will the team receive feedback from key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of DL 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 if and what changes are needed to meet implementation goals.*

- **Who will be responsible for assessing information gathered through the check-ins? Which stakeholders need to be involved?**
- **How often should feedback from monitoring be considered?**
- **What process will the State/Territory team use to evaluate feedback from multiple monitoring activities to make decisions about the implementation plan continuous improvement?**

### 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/Territory team use to determine that evidence collected points to a need to adjust or modify implementation activities?**
- **How will the team implement modifications to its comprehensive approach?**

- **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 team 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/>