

Aligned Professional Development Systems 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 an aligned professional development system (PDS). It defines the key elements of an aligned State/Territory PDS, as set out by the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan Preprint and common national models, as well as guiding principles that have emerged as States/Territories move to develop aligned PDS. A developmental continuum of systems alignment is also included in this guide. The provided considerations for developing or advancing aligned PDS are built on a readiness for change process framework, with four steps focused on goal/outcome development, fit and feasibility and readiness to 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.

The guide is presented in five sections:

- I. [Overview of Aligned PDS;](#)
- II. [Key Elements of an Aligned PDS;](#)
- III. [Guiding Principles for Aligned PDS;](#)
- IV. [Developmental Continuum of Systems Alignment;](#) and
- V. [Considerations for Developing or Advancing Aligned PDS.](#)

I. Overview of Aligned PDS

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 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 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/Territory’s context can dictate the best approach(es) for successful alignment efforts.

States and Territories have made significant investments in PDS to sustain a professionally prepared workforce of teachers, administrators, and adult educators such as TA providers, consultants, trainers, and higher education faculty. Many of these professionals have traditionally been served by multiple systems of preparation and ongoing support based on their role, setting, and funding source. Education, training, TA, and professional progression are enhanced by a single aligned system that provides opportunities for growth from entry through advanced levels.

II. Key Elements of an Aligned PDS

Five key elements of an aligned PDS as delineated in the CCDF Plan Preprint are:

1. Core Knowledge and Competencies (CKCs)
2. Career Pathways (or Career Lattice)
3. Professional Development Capacity
4. Access to Professional Development
5. Compensation, Benefits and Workforce Conditions

CKCs define the desired content and skill areas for professional training and education. Systems must have the **capacity** to deliver these opportunities to the workforce and the ability to support **access** to training and education in order to increase knowledge and competence. Development of **CKCs** should result in a workforce that makes progress on the **career pathway**, with increased **compensation and benefits**. Successful implementation includes supportive **workforce conditions** that allow for knowledge and skills to translate into improved practice and contribute to job satisfaction and retention.

To support aligned PDS, the Office of Child Care (OCC), the US Department of Education (ED), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have developed TA resources that States/Territories use to examine and plan comprehensive PDS, including:

- The former National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center’s [Early childhood professional development systems toolkit](#)
 - Focuses on system elements and components; includes “the tree”—a simplified framework that defines five professional development system elements (Core Knowledge; Qualifications, Credentials, and Pathways; Quality Assurance; Access and Outreach; and Funding)
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s [Workforce designs: A policy blueprint for state professional development systems](#)
 - Focuses on the policies that support and connect system elements—defines five essential policy areas (Professional Standards, Career Pathways, Articulation, Advisory Structure, Data, and Financing) and four principles for policy making (Integration; Quality Assurance; Diversity, Inclusion, and Access; and Compensation Parity)
- The National Professional Development Center on Inclusion’s [The big picture: A planning guide for cross-sector early childhood professional development systems](#)
 - Focuses on the “who” and “what” of PDS and “how” they work together. The four-step process looks at learners’ and PD providers’ characteristics and needs, what they should know and be able to do, and how PD can be organized and delivered most effectively.

III. Guiding Principles for Aligned PDS

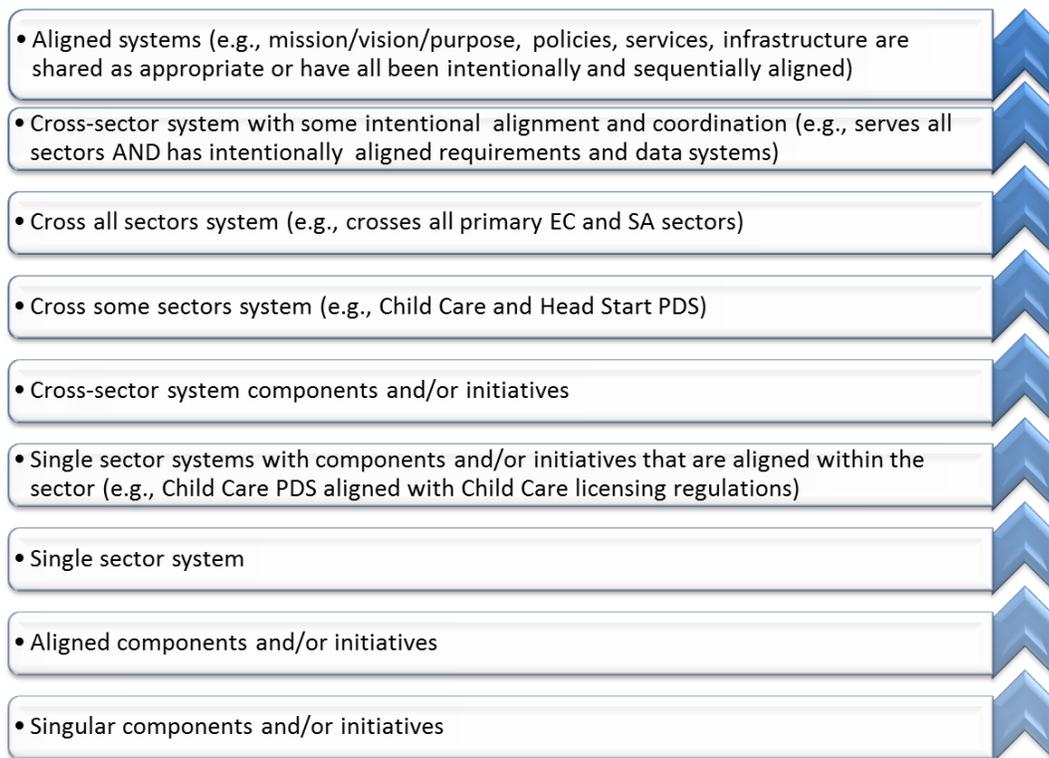
All planning for an aligned PDS use some consistent themes and promising practices. Aligned State/Territory EC and SA PDS should:

- Be an integral part of States’/Territories’ overarching quality improvement efforts, including licensing and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)
- Cross at least the primary EC and SA sectors (Child Care, Head Start and Early Head Start, pre-K, public schools, and early intervention and special education services)
- Have a clear governance structure
- Be evidence-based, carefully planned, guided, monitored, evaluated, and revised as needed
- Use a comprehensive workforce data system that links with or is a part of the State’s/Territory’s overarching EC and related data systems
- Have varied and sustainable financial resources
- Reduce duplication of efforts and increase alignment and sharing of resources where possible and sensible
- Serve professionals in all EC and SA sectors, settings, programs, and roles working with and on behalf of young children and their families
- Be based on consistent professional standards, including **CKCs**, as well as additional specializations of knowledge and skills for specific roles

- Have the **capacity** to provide standards-based trainings, supports, courses, degrees, and portable credentials
- Let professionals know about and ensure their **access** to training, education, and TA
- Have clear **career pathways** which let professionals know and plan for potential career opportunities with individualized needs assessments and advising
- Include quality assurance processes that guarantee the diverse needs and abilities of the workforce are met
- Align training, TA, and education, ensuring they have the potential to lead to certifications, credentials, degrees, and advancement on career pathways
- Link increased qualifications with increased **compensation and benefits**.

IV. Developmental Continuum of Systems Alignment

States/Territories have embarked on a variety of ambitious efforts to move beyond coordination and collaboration to systems alignment. While the following illustrates a theory of a developmental continuum of PDS alignment, in reality, State/Territory systems may move back and forth or even jump over one of the stages included in the following chart. States/Territories can use the following graphic to identify their current level of system alignment, understand how different approaches can target alignment with various sectors and related systems, and as a guide for the stages their process may take in the journey toward greater system alignment.



V. Considerations for Developing or Advancing Aligned PDS

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 an aligned PDS. Using this tool to support planning and implementation will be most successful if the State/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 goals and outcomes.](#)
2. [Determine the fit and feasibility and readiness for change.](#)
3. [Select an approach and develop an implementation plan.](#)
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 advancing an aligned PDS?**
- **How are we defining alignment? What is our vision for what an aligned PDS looks like in our State/Territory?**
- **What are the articulated goals and outcomes for PD and quality improvement of the EC and SA workforce?**
- **Is there sufficient buy-in and consensus in the State/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/Territory goals and policy to develop or advance system alignment?**
 - ◆ Does the State/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 move toward an aligned, cross-sector field?**
- **Has there been substantial change in the research since the last PDS plan or evaluation was completed?**
- **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/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 aligned approach and are committed to successful implementation.

- **Is there consensus that an aligned PDS needs to be developed or that the current PDS should advance its alignment?**
- **Is there agreement on who the aligned PDS will include and serve?**
 - ◆ Roles
 - ◆ Age ranges
 - ◆ Settings
 - ◆ Sectors
 - ◆ Related systems
- **Is there agreement on what approach is likely to make the greatest impact on system alignment?** (also see the Developmental Continuum of Systems Alignment on page 4)
 - ◆ Aligning specific components or initiatives across a few sectors
 - ◆ Aligning specific components or initiatives across all sectors
 - ◆ Aligning specific components or initiatives across all sectors and related systems
 - ◆ Aligning PDS across a few sectors
 - ◆ Aligning PDS across all sectors
 - ◆ Aligning PDS across all sectors and related systems
 - ◆ Other?
- **How will the PDS include and serve professionals in all/targeted 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 nonprofit
 - 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 alignment, 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
 - QRIS
 - State/Territory system building initiatives/plans (CCDF, State Early Childhood Advisory Council, Head Start, State Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grants, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant [RTT-ELC], etc.).
- **What are the unique needs of the infant/toddler (IT) and SA community and how will the PDS meet them?**
 - **What are the unique needs of those who provide PD (trainers, TA providers, faculty, and other adult educators) and how will the PDS meet them?**
 - **What elements or components will comprise the PDS and how will they be aligned?**
 - ◆ Will the aligned PDS be built on a common core of knowledge for all staff from all sectors and related systems working directly or indirectly with children? Will it include specialized competencies for specific roles?
 - ◆ Will there be one combined career pathway or several linked/aligned pathways?
 - ◆ Will there be credentials that recognize specialized expertise that cuts across settings and sectors?
 - ◆ Will there be access supports for the workforce in all roles, settings, and sectors?
 - ◆ Do the higher education institutions, training, and TA entities have the capacity to support the alignment and expansion goals?
 - ◆ Will there be support for articulation across courses, programs, and degrees? Support for credential portability?
 - ◆ Will there be standardization of quality of PD, training, consultation, and onsite support?
 - ◆ How will compensation and workforce conditions be addressed across all roles, settings, and sectors?
 - **How will the aligned PDS “fit” with community values, including the values of diverse cultural groups?**
 - **How will the aligned PDS fit with the State/Territory framework for the larger learning systems, birth through 21 (or other range as defined by the State/Territory)?**

Consideration of Required Changes

Purpose: Identify the specific system components, governance, political, financial, and sustainability issues that are involved in the aligned approach and the changes that are needed to make the approach operational.

- **What organization(s) are best positioned to implement, grow, and sustain the aligned PDS?**
- **How can law, regulations, policy, and guidance be used to support an aligned EC and SA PDS?**
- **What reallocations of investments, changes in policies, QRIS or licensing standards, or contracts for services are needed to develop or advance an aligned system?**
- **Which combination of investments or system elements are a good fit for the community/State/Territory?**
- **What funding resources can be accessed to support system planning and coordination?**
- **If additional funding is required, what additional funding is available, and from what sources?**
- **Does the PDS leverage new policy and funding opportunities presented by cross-agency/entity efforts such as State/Territory Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs), RTT-ELC grants, or other existing efforts?**
- **What changes need to be made to existing policies, QRIS standards, contracts with vendors, CKCs, career pathways, or TA (coaching, consultation, and mentoring) to support an aligned approach?**
 - ◆ 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
- **Are there opportunities to align expectations for appropriate salaries, benefits, and work environments into:**
 - ◆ Career pathways;
 - ◆ QRIS criteria or other quality initiatives; and/or
 - ◆ How contracts/grants or voucher providers are approved to provide child care for children from families with low-income in the subsidy system?

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 aligning the PDS by delineating the targeted settings, sectors, related systems, and goals to align specific components or the overall PDS. 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 develop and implement an aligned PDS?**

- ◆ 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 PDS (CKCs, credentials, career pathways, access, capacity, workforce data)?
 - ◆ With higher education courses and programs?
 - ◆ With other quality improvement efforts and standards (e.g., licensing, national standards, QRIS, early learning guidelines, etc.)?
- **Who should be involved in the development?**
 - ◆ What sectors and related systems?
 - ◆ What are the barriers to involving multiple sectors/related systems and can the challenges be overcome?
 - ◆ What roles and specialized areas—adult educators, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, IT, SA, special needs/early intervention, schools, etc.?
 - ◆ Members of already existing State/Territory advisory or planning groups?
- **How will the aligned PDS plan 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? How will workgroups/teams be formed?
 - ◆ Will there be writing and research guides and ground rules?
 - ◆ What is the timeframe for development/revisions?
- **What will be included in plans and the system?**
 - ◆ System mapping and guides
 - ◆ Purpose
 - ◆ Rationales
 - ◆ Research
 - ◆ Individual professional development planning/plans
 - ◆ CKCs
 - ◆ Credentials
 - ◆ Career pathways
 - ◆ Access supports
 - ◆ Multiple delivery methods
 - ◆ Capacity building
 - ◆ Compensation and workforce conditions supports
 - ◆ Others?

Communication Plan

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

- **Who needs to know about the plans for developing or advancing an aligned PDS, what do they need to know, and how will communication be conducted?**

- ◆ Various professionals across settings, sectors, 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
- **What information products are needed for which audiences?**
- **How will feedback be solicited, collected, and incorporated from all stakeholders?**

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 alignment approach and plans?**
- **What infrastructure is needed at the State/Territory level to support the comprehensive approach?**
- **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 system 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/Territory monitor the implementation of the aligned PDS plan?**
- **What indicators of successful implementation will be collected over time?**
- **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/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 (if/as needed)?**
- **Is an evaluator in place who can conduct analyses to determine if the comprehensive approach is improving alignment and affecting workforce quality?**

Step 4: Implement the Plan and Monitor Results

Assign tasks and timelines, monitor results, and make system adjustments as needed. Implementation occurs through assigned roles and responsibilities for specific action steps and a timeline for completion as considered in steps 1–3. To the extent possible, the implementation plan should build on the information gathered to date and use the results garnered through Step 3 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 reflect on lessons learned as the PDS matures.

Checking In

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

- **How will the State/Territory collect information about the progress of implementation activities to date?**
- **How will the State/Territory receive feedback from key stakeholders involved in the implementation of PDS alignment activities as well as from the key leadership of aligned settings, sectors, and related systems?**
- **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/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/Territory use to determine that the evidence collected points to a need to adjust or modify implementation activities?**
- **How will the State/Territory implement modifications to the aligned PDS?**
- **What parts of the implementation process will need to be revisited to make adjustments (e.g., will the adjustment require a new communication plan, or an invitation to new stakeholders)?**
- **What process will the State/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://siseq.fpg.unc.edu/>