

Peer-Learning Communities for State Deaf-Blind Projects

State deaf-blind project personnel are an incredibly supportive group of individuals. They work collectively to improve the lives of children who are deaf-blind and their families by:

- Sharing knowledge and expertise
- Working together to solve problems
- Collaborating to provide services

To make this type of networking across state lines as easy as possible, NCDB offers peer-learning communities (PLCs). The following national initiatives will have one or more PLCs focused on specific topics or service areas—Family Engagement, Early Identification and Intervention, Interveners and Qualified Personnel, and Transition. They are primarily for state deaf-blind projects but depending on the needs and wishes of the group, may include representatives from other national entities (e.g., family organizations or the Helen Keller National Center).

We hope you will join us in this important work.

Activities

Group Needs Assessment

Each PLC begins with a needs assessment (e.g., brief survey, brainstorming) and identification of individual and group goals. Needs assessments are repeated at regular intervals to ensure the PLC is meeting participants' needs.

Group Problem-Solving

Based on needs assessment findings, participants work together to choose discussion topics and prioritize the order in which they will be addressed. They also choose a group problem-solving framework, which can change over time, as needed.

PLC Benefits

- Predictable model for coming together in a spirit of learning and collaboration
- Information about promising practices
- Insight into barriers to successful implementation of policies and practices
- Solutions to common problems
- Platform for those with more experience to share their knowledge with those just beginning to learn
- Capture existing knowledge and evaluate high-quality child-specific and systems-change practices

Case Examples

Case examples provide a way for members to share strategies that have worked well for them, discuss challenges, and ask other members for support or suggestions. Depending on the PLC's focus, examples can be related to child-specific or systems TA. Case examples provide ideas and inspiration for members to try new strategies in their own states.

Study Groups

Study groups allow interested participants to delve into a topic more deeply or learn a skill together, such as the development of effective coaching practices.

Professional Development

Addressing needs through professional development is another way participants might decide to use the group, by recruiting members or bringing in outside experts to present on specific topics.

Resource Sharing

Organizing information in private groups gives participants a way to share and access resources. With permission NCDB can then disseminate knowledge beyond the group. Existing examples include [Increasing Recognition and Use of Interveners: State Success Stories](#) and [Self-Assessment Guide Stories](#).

How You Can Participate

Expectations for participants vary depending on the topic and group needs, but you should plan on committing 1 to 3 hours per month to prepare for and participate in activities for a single PLC. Interested participants will be asked to read [Readiness for Targeted TA](#) before committing to group membership. It can help you determine if a group is a good fit for you and your project at the present time. Introductory group meetings and consultation with the NCDB lead for a group can also help you make this decision.

How PLCs Differ From Other Groups

State Deaf-Blind Project Groups

In addition to PLCs, NCDB provides a number of other opportunities for state deaf-blind projects to network and collaborate. These include:

- Webinars – online presentations that include opportunities for discussion
- Online meetings or drop-in calls – meetings that are organized around specific topics, but allow more time for discussion and are less formal than webinars

- Collaborative working groups – groups of state deaf-blind projects with formal agreements to join forces to accomplish a goal (e.g., transition institutes)
- Annual 1- to 2-day meetings that all state deaf-blind projects attend

PLCs vs. Communities of Practice

NCDB's PLCs differ from communities of practice (CoPs). PLCs are primarily for state deaf-blind projects and are tightly focused on a specific topic or area of practice. In contrast, CoPs are open to a broad range of participants and cover a wider array of topics (determined by CoP members). Currently, NCDB provides assistance to the National Deaf Blind Educator Network, a community of practice for teachers and other practitioners who work with children and youth who are deaf-blind.

National Center on Deaf-Blindness, 2019

nationaldb.org

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326T180026. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Susan Weigert.

