



ASPIRE

Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness
for Education and Employment
A PROMISE Initiative

Chapter 2:
ASPIRE Consortium
Formation, Operation and Implications

January 6, 2020

Table of Contents

Site Structure, Organization and Analysis	6
North Dakota.....	7
Structure.	7
IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018).	7
Personnel – hiring, retention and supervision.	7
Contracts and MOUs.....	8
Intervention delivery.	8
Intervention participation.....	9
Advisory committee.....	9
American Indian Tribes.	9
Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)	10
Montana.....	10
Structure.	10
IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018).	11
Personnel – hiring, attrition and supervision.	11
Contracts and MOUs.....	12
Intervention delivery.	13
Intervention participation.....	13
American Indian Tribes.	13
Advisory Committee.	13
Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)	14
South Dakota.....	15
Structure.	15
IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018).	15
Personnel – hiring, retention and supervision.	16
Contracts and MOUs.....	16
Interventions delivery.....	17
Intervention participation.....	17

Advisory committee.....	17
American Indian Tribes.....	17
Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)	17
Utah	19
.....
Structure.....	19
IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018).	19
Personnel – hiring, retention and supervision.	19
Contracts and MOUs.....	20
Interventions delivery.....	21
Intervention participation.....	21
Advisory committee.....	21
American Indian Tribes.....	21
Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)	22
Colorado.....	22
Structure.....	22
IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018).	23
Personnel – hiring, attrition and supervision.	23
Contracts and MOUs.....	24
Intervention delivery.....	25
Intervention participation.....	25
American Indian Tribes.....	25
Advisory committee.....	25
Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)	26
Arizona.....	26
Structure.....	26
IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018).	26
Personnel – hiring, attrition and supervision.	27
Contracts and MOUs.....	30
Intervention delivery.....	30

Intervention participation.....	32
Intensive monitoring by ASPIRE and OSEP.	32
ASPIRE Site Visit.	33
American Indian Tribes.	33
Advisory committee.....	33
Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)	34
Summary of Challenges and Success Strategies by ASPIRE	36
Operating a Consortium.....	36
Authority and Accountability.....	36
Fiscal Processes.....	37
Internal Agency Procedures.....	38
Communication.....	38
Implications for Future Consortium	39
Considerations before Beginning.....	39
The Operation of a Consortium	40
Structure.	40
Documentation is essential.....	40
Consistent meeting schedule.....	40
Monitor work.	40
Communication and relationships.....	40
Diversity and cultural considerations.	41
Personnel and attrition.	41
Contracting.....	42
Closing a Consortium	42
Summary	42
Attachment A: List of ASPIRE Contracts and MOUs.	44
List of Tables	
1. ASPIRE Enrollment Data by Site	6
2. North Dakota Intervention Participation.....	9

3. Montana Intervention Participation.....	13
4. South Dakota Intervention Participation.....	17
5. Utah Intervention Participation.....	21
6. Colorado Intervention Participation.....	25
7. Arizona Case Management Onboarding and Attrition.....	30
8. Arizona Intervention Participation.....	32

List of Figures

1. ASPIRE Arizona Organization 2014 – 2016	28
2. ASPIRE Arizona Organization 2016 – 2017.....	28
3. ASPIRE Arizona Organization 2017 – 2019	29

This chapter of the ASPIRE final report is specific to ASPIRE as a PROMISE consortium. It is the second of six documents. Chapter 1 describes a complete summary of ASPIRE formation, implementation, evaluation and conclusion. Chapter 3 describes ASPIRE’s implementation of the ABLÉ deposit opportunity. Chapter 4 describes the ASPIRE’s comprehensive training program to ensure fidelity of the PROMISE research study. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of ASPIRE’s Formative Evaluation Team. Utilizing the lessons learned and development of best practices, ASPIRE’s recommendations are in Chapter 6.

The ASPIRE consortium is unique among Department of Education Model Demonstration Projects. An award had not previously been made to a consortium of states. As previously described in Chapter 1: ASPIRE Summary Report, implementation across six unique states required extensive organization, communication and training. This Chapter seeks to describe the unique features of each site and the challenges overcome to maintain the integrity of a single project.

Site Structure, Organization and Analysis

Each of the six states comprising ASPIRE have unique governmental structure and culture. While it could be seen as a danger to the integrity of a consortium, ASPIRE overcome the many differences and successfully maintained the integrity of the PROMSIE Initiative. This section will review the unique characteristics of each site, including the structure, relationships, personnel, implementation, and how challenges were overcome.

Each Site was tasked to enroll 18.2% of their eligible youth. The number to enroll was identified in ASPIRE’s proposal and included in the USOR contracts with the states. Five of the six Sites met their enrollment targets. Only Arizona was unable to reach its target. The remaining five Sites had previously completed their enrollment targets. In February 2016, these five again enrolled youth in order for ASPIRE to reach the target of 2000 enrollees. In the end, ASPIRE surpassed its enrollment target, achieving 102% enrollment. See Table 1 for enrollment data for each ASPIRE site.

Table 1. ASPIRE Enrollment Data by Site

	Enrollment Target	Enrolled	ASPIRE Services	Usual Services
Arizona	1050	1002	506	496
Colorado	400	447	225	222
Montana	120	137	69	68
North Dakota	50	57	28	29
South Dakota	130	132	66	66
Utah	250	276	139	137
Totals	2000	2051	1033	1018

A total of 58 contracts were executed to deliver all services within ASPIRE. The Utah State Office of Rehabilitation secured contracts with the Sites, for formative evaluation and Utah interventions. Each Site then executed between 5 and 11 separate contracts for the implementation of ASPIRE. Additionally, ASPIRE received approval from 11 American Indian Tribes to recruit, enroll and serve youth and families living on Tribal Lands. A list is provided in the discussion of each site. See Appendix A for a complete list of contracts. Additional MOUs were gathered in each state to provide support to ASPIRE staff.

North Dakota

Structure. ASPIRE North Dakota was located at Minot State University in the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) which is the North Dakota Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service (NDCPD). There were several advantages to NDCPD being the North Dakota home of ASPIRE. The NDCPD has over 30 years of successfully implementing many federal grants and Model Demonstration Projects, including North Dakota's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. The NDCPD is also a respected state, regional and local partner, including state agencies, provider organizations, advocacy organizations and people with disabilities. As a university institution, they have a strong background in human subjects' research and the ongoing training of staff in the protections of personally identifiable information.

All ASPIRE North Dakota staff were hired by Minot State University and lived in Minot. While centrally located in the state, the youth and families lived across the large geographical state. This meant that the staff were not from the community in which the youth and families lived. Case Managers also traveled a great deal in order to meet with the ASPIRE youth and families.

IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018). Minot State University provided the initial Reliance Agreement to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board in 2014. Minot State University also met the new requirement in 2018 for a Federal Wide Assurance.

Personnel – hiring, retention and supervision. ASPIRE North Dakota included one part-time Site Coordinator, one part time Administrative Support Staff and Two Case Managers. While enrolling, the staff also included an Enrollment Specialist. NDCPD hired quickly after the contract with USOR was executed. By hiring early in the process, the Site Coordinator and Case Managers participated in the development of ASPIRE procedures. With the delay in recruitment and enrollment, some staff struggled with the early lack of case management services during the development stage of ASPIRE.

The Site Coordinator, one Case Manager and the Administrative Support Staff stayed through the term of ASPIRE. The other Case Manager position had five different individuals in the position for shorter periods of time, ranging from 9 to 37 months. During periods of

vacancy, the Site Coordinator and remaining Case Manager shared the second caseload. Reasons for leaving ASPIRE included an internal promotion at NDCPD, desire for less travel, outside position paying more, and marrying and moving out of state. The Site Coordinator believes that the consistent ASPIRE training program as well as the collegial support, helped to ensure that all procedures were implemented to fidelity.

While being located in a single city increased travel, it also allowed for ease of supervision, training and coordination of the staff. Weekly meetings were held to discuss any new issues, implementation strategies and trainings. The proximity of offices meant there were many opportunities to discuss youth and families challenges and brainstorm strategies. The Site Coordinator also maintained frequent email communication that included any approaching deadlines.

Contracts and MOUs. The North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities entered into six contracts for the delivery of service interventions in North Dakota. They were with Pathfinder Parent Center (the state Parent Training and Information Center), Building Inclusive Partnerships (NDCPD), Rehab Services, Inc., the Dakota Center for Independent Living, Option Resource Center for Independent Living and Independence Inc., Center for Independent Living. All but two contracts were for the term of ASPIRE:

- Pathfinder Parent Training Center, Parent Education and Training, 10/1/2014 – 9/30/2017
- Building Inclusive Partnerships, Parent Education and Training, 10/1/2017 – 2/28/2019
- Rehab Services, Inc., Benefits Counseling, 4/1/2015 – 2/28/2019
- Dakota Center for Independent Living, Financial Education and Capability Training, 4/4/2016 – 9/20/2018
- Options Resource Center for Independent Living, Financial Education and Capability Training, 5/4/2016 – 9/30/2018
- Independence Inc., Center for Independent Living, Financial Education and Capability Training, 5/4/2016 – 2/28/2019

It should also be noted that there was a change in personnel at the Pathfinder Parent Training Center that resulted in their inability to continue the contract after 9/30/2017. Building Inclusive Partnerships is a project of the NDCPD and they began providing the Parent Training after Pathfinder was unable to do so.

Intervention delivery. Locating a contractor for the Youth Self-Determination Training proved difficult. Centers for Independent Living and the state Parent Training and Information Center both declined. A similar situation developed in South Dakota. Using the ASPIRE Scope of Work, ASPIRE staff in both states collaborated to develop a curriculum for delivery in South and North Dakota. In North Dakota, ASPIRE contracted with other staff in the NDCPD to deliver the training. Six individuals worked as the trainers from NDCPD during the time of ASPIRE.

As noted above, the delivery of the Family Financial Education and Capability Training started later than the other interventions. The Site Coordinator reached out to the Community Action Partnership organizations and was working on a contract. However, at the last minute the CAP organizations declined. The Site Coordinator then reached the Centers for Independent Living. Three of the four Centers agreed to provide the intervention, but expressed concerns about their ability to offer quality training. The Site Coordinator hired an outside agency to provide training in the Four Cornerstones of Financial Literacy Curriculum. After this ‘trainer training’ was complete the three Centers for Independent Living began offering the Family Financial Education and Capability Training to the ASPIRE youth and families.

Intervention participation. ASPIRE North Dakota youth and family participated in the service interventions at a higher rate than the average participation of families across all of ASPIRE. Opportunities for participation were provided in five areas of the state: Minot, Belcourt (Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa Tribe), Bismarck, Grand Forks and Fargo. In the Fargo area, ASPIRE North Dakota was unable to contract with a specific provider of Financial Education and Capability Training. ASPIRE Case Managers identified community agencies and referred the ASPIRE youth and families.

Table 2. North Dakota Intervention Participation

Intervention	ASPIRE (n=1033)	Percent of participation	South Dakota (n=29)	Percent of Participation
Ever Employed	387	37.46%	18	62.07%
Self-Determination	451	43.66%	18	62.07%
Family Financial	499	48.31%	20	68.97%
Parent	301	29.14%	17	58.62%
Benefits Counseling	417	40.37%	21	72.41%

Advisory committee. Each ASPIRE Site organized an Advisory Committee. The North Dakota Advisory Committee was composed of the requisite PROMISE partners and representatives from the community and NGOs. Overall, the meetings were helpful in connecting Case Managers to the necessary resources to serve the youth and families. Membership and participation was consistent over the term of ASPIRE, though what began as a resource for ASPIRE, became more of an update to the members. Members appreciated learning effective implementation methods, resources and strategies.

American Indian Tribes. North Dakota is home to four American Indian Tribes: Spirit Lake, Standing Rock Sioux, Three affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold Reservation and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians of North Dakota. ASPIRE intentionally sought to enter into relationships with these tribes. This required ASPIRE to seek consent/approval from the tribe’s research review boards or the Tribal Council. The Site Coordinator, in collaboration with the ASPIRE Principal Investigator, conducted this process, completing presentations and

applications. Of the four North Dakota Tribes, two provided approval to ASPIRE. These are: Standing Rock Sioux and Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa Indians of North Dakota. Standing Rock Sioux Reservation crosses both South and North Dakota.

Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)

State and Local Environment

Financial Training Provider. Providing services in rural North Dakota presented challenges. Strategies included reimbursing families for transportation costs, ASPIRE Case Managers and contracted providers traveling to youth and families' homes or communities. One strategy implemented by the Case Managers was to make a one-week loop together through more rural areas. When families might cancel one day, they could say they would be available the next morning before traveling to another distant city. Distance often meant that the Case Managers were unable to make more face to face contacts with families, other than once a month. Case Managers then increased efforts on more frequent communication between monthly appointments, mailing the youth/family goals, emailing intervention reminders and texting timely information.

Administration

Intervention Capacity. Faced with difficulty in contracting for both Youth Self-Determination and Family Financial Education and Capability Training, the Site Coordinator and Case Managers found alternative ways to build capacity. This in turn will remain passed the conclusion of ASPIRE. Because of the distances, contractors and families both struggled with meeting for an hour or two. After surveying families it was decided to host a 'retreat-style' weekend at a hotel. During the evening and following day, the youth and families could attend various intervention sessions. Direct billing of the hotel, provided meals and provided gas cards in advance meant families did not have any out of pocket expenses to attend.

Purchasing. The Utah State Office of Rehabilitation made purchases and shipped to Minot State University. There were delays due to the timeline for purchasing and shipping. Additionally, this shifted to fiscal burden to the project while reducing the need for these funds in North Dakota. Minot State was able to make other purchases of Participant Support, as well as provide mileage reimbursement, train ticket purchases, hotel nights and per diem.

Montana

Structure. ASPIRE Montana was located within the Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS), the Disability Employment and Transitions Division (DETD). Montana personnel originally included a Site Coordinator, Administrative Support Staff at DETD; a Case Manager in the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI); and an Enrollment Specialist and two Case Managers in the Office of Public Instruction. Shortly after ASPIRE beginning, the contract with DLI ended and the Case Manager position moved to DETD. After enrollment ended, the

Enrollment Specialist position moved back to DETD and became a Case Manager serving eastern Montana. In early 2018, an additional Case Manager position was created in the DETD, making a total of six employees for the state.

Housing staff in two separate state agencies initially posed communication and supervisory challenges. The OPI director communicated to his Case Managers that the Site Coordinator, though located in another agency would provide the direct day to day supervision, and he would support them. The advantages of working within two agencies afforded the Montana team greater connections into the local schools and a quicker understanding of the educational processes and options available to ASPIRE youth.

Administrative changes in DPHHS occurred several times during the term of ASPIRE. Initial contracting and staff hiring occurred under one Montana DETD Administrator. In early 2017, he was dismissed. DPHHS chose to place an interim administrator from another Division to lead DETD. Approximately a year later, another interim administrator replaced the first. This second interim administrator eventually was named as the DETD Administrator. The Montana ASPIRE Site Coordinator invested a great deal of time and energy to educate the new administrators and secure their support. Once this rapport was established, communication increased, operations smoothed out and responsiveness increased. There were no administrative changes in OPI during this time.

[IRB reliance agreement \(2013\) and federal wide assurance \(2018\)](#). DPHHS and OPI provided the initial Reliance Agreement to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board in 2014. Both agencies also met the new requirement in 2018 for a Federal Wide Assurance.

[Personnel – hiring, attrition and supervision](#). The ASPIRE Montana Site Coordinator was located in DPHHS, DETD. This individual directly supervised the DPHHS staff and provided procedural guidance and oversight of the OPI Case Managers. The first Site Coordinator began in May, 2014, and resigned in early 2017. Case Manager Tisha Harry applied for and was promoted to the position very shortly thereafter. The Administrative Support Staff member was employed for the entire time of ASPIRE.

As previously stated, USOR contracted with DPHHS who subsequently subcontracted with OPI for two Case Managers. Both DETD and OPI committed to an expedited hiring of Case Managers as was possible. Despite requests to participate in the hiring of the OPI Case Managers, DETD and the Site Coordinator did not participate in the hiring of the two original OPI Case Managers. In time, one Case Manager requested to work only part time, for personal reasons. This created a strain on the remaining staff. This Case Manager retired at the end of 2017 and was replaced within one month. The Site Coordinator was included in the hiring of this position. The second OPI Case Manager occupied this position for the entirety of ASPIRE. The OPI Supervisor filled several roles in OPI in addition to ASPIRE. He managed all travel, timesheets, and OPI requirements. OPI did not receive funds for the supervision, only for the Case Managers.

In 2015, the third Case Manager (formerly the Enrollment Specialist) was hired. This staff member remained on ASPIRE only nine months. His position was filled in less than six weeks by Tisha Harry, who later became the Montana Site Coordinator when the original Site Coordinator resigned in early 2017. She remained with ASPIRE for the remainder of the project.

In early 2018, in anticipation of a strong project closure, DETD hired a fourth Case Manager. This reduced the size of the case management caseloads and allowed each Case Manager to invest substantial time and effort with each youth and family, resulting in greater independence and self-determination.

The largest challenge was the salary differential with OPI Case Managers earning close to \$20,000 more annually than the DPHHS Case Managers. DPHHS was eventually able to reduce this difference, but it did not entirely remedy the discrepancy. Despite the OPI Supervisor's commitment to allow the DPHHS Site Coordinator to supervise the OPI Case Managers, one Case Manager challenged this during her time with ASPIRE. Though never fully resolved prior to the Case Manager's resignation, it did firm the commitment of OPI moving forward.

In all, seven individuals filled four Case Manager positions in six years. Strong Site Coordinators stepped in during vacancies, and performed the additional case management duties. This commitment to ensuring continued work with ASPIRE youth and families reduced possible negative impacts during the time of vacancies. A side benefit was that having covered all caseloads, the Site Coordinators knew all the youth and provided valuable insights to the Case Managers.

Contracts and MOUs. DETD entered into a total of eleven contracts to provide all interventions across the vast geographical area of Montana. These included the Office of Public Instruction, Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow, Montana Independent Living Project, Montana State University, Billings, North Central Independent Living Services, Parents Let's Unite for Kids, Rural Dynamics, Inc. and Summit Independent Living Center. All but two were contracts were for the term of ASPIRE.

1. The Office of Public Instruction - Case Managers
2. Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow, Youth Self Determination, 8/1/15-15-2/28/19
3. Montana Independent Living Project, Benefits Counseling, 5/1/16-2/28/19
4. Montana Independent Living Project, Youth Self Determination, 12/1/15-2/28/19
5. Montana State University Billings, Benefits Counseling, 5/1/16-2/28/19
6. North Central Independent Living Services, Benefits Counseling, 5/1/16-2/28/19
7. North Central Independent Living Services, Youth Self Determination, 7/1/15-2/28/19
8. Parents Let's Unite for Kids, Parent Education and Training, 7/1/15-2/28/19
9. Rural Dynamics Inc., Financial Education and Capability Training, 7/1/15 – 9/20/18
10. SUMMIT Independent Living Center, Benefits Counseling, 5/1/16-6/8/17
11. SUMMIT Independent Living Center, Youth Self Determination, 8/1/15 – 9/20/18

Intervention delivery. Each service intervention included the corresponding ASPIRE Scope of Work. As noted by the dates above, most contracts were for the term of ASPIRE. There were some delays in the start of service interventions, and some ended prior to the end of services on February 28, 2019. This is in part due to the need to scale up to provide services, and then the capacity issues to continue the services. When faced with these challenges the ASPIRE Montana staff searched for and found, affordable and suitable alternatives that met the ASPIRE Scopes of Work.

In summary, the following opportunities were provided to ASPIRE Montana youth and families.

Service Intervention	Contracts	Trainings offered
Self Determination	5	172
Parent Training	1	66
Financial Education	1	62

Intervention participation. ASPIRE Montana youth and family participated in the service interventions at a higher rate than the average participation of families across all of ASPIRE.

Table 3. Montana Intervention Participation

Intervention	ASPIRE (n=1033)	Percent of participation	Montana (n=69)	Percent of Participation
Ever Employed	387	37.46%	46	66.67%
Self-Determination	451	43.66%	37	53.62%
Family Financial	499	48.31%	42	60.87%
Parent	301	29.14%	22	31.32%
Benefits Counseling	417	40.37%	43	62.32%

American Indian Tribes. Montana has eight federally recognized American Indian communities and one state recognized Tribe. ASPIRE intentionally sought to enter into relationships with these tribes. This required ASPIRE to seek consent/approval from the tribes' research review boards or the tribal council. The Site Coordinator working with the ASPIRE Principal Investigator, conducted this process, completing presentations and applications. Of the eight Montana Tribes, ASPIRE received approval to conduct recruitment, enrollment and provide services from three of the Tribes. They are the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Blackfoot Nation and the Confederated Tribes of Salish and Kootenai. The Blackfoot Nation is the 10th largest American Indian Tribe by population (2010 Census)

Advisory Committee. Each ASPIRE Site organized an Advisory Committee. The Montana Advisory Committee was composed of the requisite PROMISE partners, ASPIRE providers and representatives from the community and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Overall, the meetings were helpful in connecting Case Mangers to the necessary resources to serve the youth and families. Over time, the focus shifted as members generally sought updates on research, data and results. It should be noted, that members also used the Advisory Committee

meeting as a way to learn what was happening at DETD, as the interim administrator always provided an update on the status of vocational rehabilitation services, the order of selection, budget constraints, etc.

Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)

State and Local Environment

State Government Budget Crisis. Montana state government experienced a serious budget crisis in 2016, which significantly impacted all of Montana state government. In DPHS DETD, rural vocational rehabilitation offices were closed and staff reduced. To serve all areas of the state, many counselors became itinerant. In fact, Helena, the state capitol, is served by an itinerant counselor one day a week. All vocational rehabilitation services entered Order of Selection, with all categories closed. This meant that any ASPIRE youth who had not applied for services, would not be served, indefinitely. The Developmental Disabilities Program terminated state employees and shifted to private contractors for service coordination/case management. In-state travel was restricted and out-of-state travel prohibited. USOR provided documents indicating the need to continue travel by Case Managers, both in state and out of state. It was a difficult time, which resulted in the appointment of interim DETD administrators. ASPIRE continued and as necessary the Project Director reached out to the DETD administrators to explain the urgency to maintain ASPIRE operations to the full and contracted extent.

American Indian Tribes. As with most governmental organizations, roles and responsibilities shift and change as staff members change. ASPIRE was not required to conduct quarterly or annual reporting with any of the Montana Tribes. As such, when personnel changed, the Site Coordinator was not always able to reestablish communication and rapport. This was particularly noted with the change in Site Coordinators. It's essential to maintain contact, even when not required to do so, in order to continue a strong communication and relationship.

Administration

Multiple Hiring Authorities. While overall, the relationship between the Site Coordinator and the OPI Manager was positive, the pay inequity and supervisory challenges outweighed the benefits of agency cooperation. It would have been more effective and less challenging had all the Case Managers worked in one agency, and were directly supervised by the Site Coordinator.

Organize Staff Communication. With staff in four locations across the state, it was important for the Site Coordinator to conduct individual meetings with each Case Manager, in addition to monthly staff meetings. Additional meetings between Case Managers and the Site Coordinator were beneficial when there is attrition. When departing, the Case Manager can introduce the Site Coordinator, and possibly the new Case Manager, resulting in a 'warm handoff' with the youth and family.

Audit Staff Work. Distance supervision is a difficult task. ASPIRE began auditing cases in 2016. However it was difficult for Site Coordinators to make the time needed to conduct thorough audits of each Case Manager's work. With many tasks already to complete, the several hours needed to audit each case was difficult to find. A consistent formal process, implemented very early in the project would have defined this work in a manner that would be manageable for the Site Coordinator.

Monitoring Subcontractors. Frequent meetings with contractors will ensure that they remain compliant with the delivery of their services, without drifting to established work. While the ASPIRE Scope of Work and contract outlined quarterly reporting, this was often too late to identify drifting, and make course corrections. Site Coordinators should track all communication, and monitor the details such as trainings offered, diversity of locations, invoice details, etc. As contractors opted not to continue contracts, it would have been beneficial to have a means by which ASPIRE would provide the training in-house.

Purchasing. ASPIRE Montana was able to purchase gas gift cards and provide mileage reimbursement. However procedures did not allow for the purchase of general gift cards. To resolve this, USOR purchased gift cards and shipped them to ASPIRE Montana. DETD was able to make individual purchases of items for Participant Support.

South Dakota

Structure. ASPIRE South Dakota was located in the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) in the Department of Human Services. DRS contracted with the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC) to implement ASPIRE in South Dakota. DRS and BHSSC have a long and successful history of collaboration in federal projects, including the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

There were several advantages to having both entities involved specifically in regard to two of the interventions. BHSSC manages the South Dakota Benefits Specialist Network (SDBSN) for the State of South Dakota. The process for making referrals for ASPIRE youth to receive benefits counseling services was a streamlined process and could be expedited when necessary due to both projects being housed at BHSSC. Likewise, in regard to the paid work experience intervention, DRS implements Project Skills, a program which provides paid work experiences for transition-aged clients of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). ASPIRE staff were co-located with VR Counselors in two locations which made the referral process for Project Skills or Vocational Rehabilitation as simple as walking down the hallway with the youth.

IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018). DHS DRS and BHSSC provided the initial Reliance Agreement to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board in 2014. Despite challenges in communicating with the US Department of Human Services, both agencies met the new requirement in 2018 for a Federal Wide Assurance.

Personnel – hiring, retention and supervision. ASPIRE South Dakota staff were hired by BHSSC. Interviews were conducted by BHSSC and DRS Staff. The first Site Coordinator was hired first followed by the Case Managers. The top candidates were offered the three Case Manager positions following state and federal background checks. The three staff originally hired remained Case Managers throughout the time of ASPIRE until their positions closed. This lack of turnover provided great continuity in ASPIRE South Dakota. ASPIRE supported two of the Case Managers to become Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs) which further supported the ASPIRE youth in learning about their benefits and participation in interventions.

An administrative support position was not filled as a full-time position in ASPIRE South Dakota. Intermittent support was provided by including ASPIRE duties in an existing BHSSC position.

The first Site Coordinator retired in September 2018, ASPIRE’s original closing date. Her duties were primarily assigned to her supervisor, the BHSSC Project Manager, with support by Case Managers completing some tasks.

The Site Coordinator provided direct supervision and technical assistance to the Case Managers on a daily/weekly basis. The Site Coordinator reviewed cases with the Case Managers and reviewed documentation in AIMs to ensure fidelity in case management services and interventions. The Project Manager and Site Coordinator met weekly to review progress of ASPIRE and discuss any complicated issues. The Project Manager also provided oversight for benefits counseling services for the Case Managers who were also CWICs.

Contracts and MOUs. DRS had one contract with BHSSC for implementation of ASPIRE and case management in South Dakota. BHSSC then entered into three contracts to provide the Financial Education and Capability Training intervention. They were Lutheran Social Services, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of the Black Hills and Lakota Funds. DRS retained one contract with the South Dakota Parent Connection for the delivery of the Parent Education and Training intervention. These contracts continued for the term of ASPIRE. These contracts are:

- Consumer Credit Counseling of the Black Hills, Financial Education and Capability Training, 11/4/2014 – 2/28/19
- Lakota Funds, Financial Education and Capability Training, 7/9/15 – 2/28/19
- Lutheran Social Services, Financial Education and Capability Training, 3/6/17- 2/28/19
- SD Parent Connection (9/30/14), Parent Education and Training, 9/30/14 – 2/28/29

Locating a contractor for the Youth Self-Determination Training proved difficult. Centers for Independent Living and the state Parent Training and Information Center both declined. A similar situation developed in North Dakota. Using the ASPIRE Scope of Work, ASPIRE staff in South Dakota worked with the staff of the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities to develop a curriculum for delivery in South and North Dakota. In South Dakota, one Case Manager was responsible for delivery across the state.

Interventions delivery. Each service intervention included the corresponding ASPIRE Scope of Work. As noted above, all contracts were for the term of ASPIRE. With time, the contractors scaled up and provided intervention opportunities across the state. They even offered additional opportunities when requested for a specific situation. As previously noted, Self-Determination training was provided by ASPIRE, rather than on contract. This was advantageous when the Alternative Delivery of ASPIRE Interventions was introduced. The Case Manager providing the training then taught the other two Case Managers to deliver the service as well.

Intervention participation. ASPIRE South Dakota youth and family participated in the service interventions at a higher rate than the average participation of families across all of ASPIRE.

Table 4. South Dakota Intervention Participation

Intervention	ASPIRE (n=1033)	Percent of participation	South Dakota (n=65)	Percent of Participation
Ever Employed	387	37.46%	46	70.77%
Self-Determination	451	43.66%	47	72.31%
Family Financial	499	48.31%	43	66.15%
Parent	301	29.14%	28	43.08%
Benefits Counseling	417	40.37%	41	63.08%

Advisory committee. Each ASPIRE Site organized an Advisory Committee. The South Dakota Advisory Committee was composed of the requisite PROMISE partners and representatives from the community and NGOs. Overall, the meetings were helpful in connecting Case Managers to the necessary resources to serve the youth and families. Membership and participation were consistent over the term of ASPIRE, though what began as a resource for ASPIRE, became more of an update to the members.

American Indian Tribes. South Dakota has eight American Indian Communities. ASPIRE intentionally sought to enter into relationships with these tribes. This required ASPIRE to seek consent/approval from the tribe’s research review boards or the Tribal Council. The Site Coordinator, in collaboration with the ASPIRE Principal Investigator, conducted this process, completing presentations and applications. Of the eight South Dakota Tribes, five provided approval to ASPIRE. These are: Crow Creek, Oglala Sioux, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and Standing Rock Sioux. Standing Rock reservation land crosses both South and North Dakota.

Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)

State and Local Environment

Rural Strategies. Providing services in rural South Dakota presented challenges. Strategies included reimbursing families for transportation costs, ASPIRE traveling to youth and families' homes or communities. Even with appointments, Case Managers could travel hundreds of miles to find that parents had forgotten the appointment or an emergency would arise, preventing the family from being home when the Case Manager arrived. Case Managers focused efforts on more frequent communication between appointments and calling the day of, to confirm the meeting prior to driving.

Lack of Information. Despite Benefits Counseling by a CWIC being housed within BHSSC, it quickly became apparent that professionals and families were unaware of the service. As Case Managers worked with school personnel and community providers, they became a 'walking advertisement' for Benefits Counseling. Overall this increased the knowledge of the service, but was primarily limited to the youth age group.

Administration

ASPIRE Delivery of Service Interventions. Case Managers as Certified Work Incentive Coordinators positively impacted the number of youth and families pursuing learning about public benefits. The Case Manager and CWIC were one in the same, the Case Manager could address all aspects of the benefits world within the context of case management services. There were no delays in providing the information, such as waiting for a referral to be processed. On-going discussions could also occur.

Additionally, the provision of Youth Self-Determination Training by an ASPIRE Case Manager improved participation as well. Knowledge and skills were reinforced during case management meetings because the Case Managers communicated and jointly worked to offer the training to the youth.

Utah

Structure. ASPIRE Utah was located in the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR), which in 2013 was located in the Utah State Board of Education. In 2016, the USOR became a division of the Utah Department of Workforce Services. While the move only minimally directly impacted the ASPIRE Utah team, they did learn new procedures for travel and vehicle use, as well as participate in more frequent agency trainings.

The ASPIRE Utah team was composed of a Site Coordinator, Administrative Support Staff and four Case Managers. All but one Case Manager was co-located in the same building in Draper, Utah, with the APL team. The Site Coordinator reported directly to the Project Director, and supervised the ASPIRE Utah team. An Enrollment Specialist was also located in Draper from March 2014, through January 2016. A fourth Case Manager was located in southwestern Utah to provide services to ASPIRE youth and families living in southern and central Utah. Caseloads were distributed evenly across the Case Managers, though some had more miles to travel than others to meet with ASPIRE youth and families.

IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018). USOR provided the initial Reliance Agreement to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board in 2014. USOR also met the new requirement in 2018 for a Federal Wide Assurance.

Personnel – hiring, retention and supervision. ASPIRE Utah staff were hired by the USOR, following the State Department of Human Resource Management procedures. The first Site Coordinator was hired first, followed by all the remaining staff. Two of the Case Managers remained throughout the time of ASPIRE until their positions closed. Four additional staff filled the remaining two original positions, with a range of months worked from 14 to 47. A fifth Case Manager was hired in January, 2018 through March, 2019 to reduce the overall caseload size in preparation for the closing of case management services. During the term of ASPIRE, five individuals filled the one Administrative Support position. The first Site Coordinator worked for 10 months before returning to USOR as a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. The second Site Coordinator began in February 2015 and remained until that position ended in 2019.

A total of 16 people were hired for eight positions. The hiring process ranged from six to eight weeks, with another four to six to obtain the Suitability Clearance. The transition of meeting and building rapport with the youth and families could then take another few months.

The Site Coordinator stepped in to meet with youth and families when the position located in southern/central Utah was vacant. When a Case Manager position was vacant in northern Utah, the Site Coordinator and other Case Managers provided case management. When a vacancy was anticipated, the Site Coordinator accompanied the departing Case Manager to meet with the youth and families and hopefully facilitate a smooth transition. More disruptive was the frequent turnover of the Administrative Support position. As an entry level position in the state government, it's frequently seen as an entry point from which to move up, which is what happened in three instances. This position provided office support to

the Utah team and was responsible to assist with making appointments and reminder calls as well as running reports in AIMS for the Site Coordinator.

The Site Coordinator provided direct supervision and technical assistance to the Case Managers. The second Site Coordinator met with each Case Manager weekly and conducted team staff meetings at least monthly. The Site Coordinator reviewed cases with the Case Managers and reviewed documentation in AIMS to ensure fidelity in case management services and interventions. The Project Manager and Site Coordinator met weekly to review progress of ASPIRE and discuss any complicated issues.

One comment frequently made by the Utah team was the proximity to the APL Trainers. While all staff were encouraged to contact the Trainers when they had questions, the Utah team members could literally walk down the hall and have face to face conversations. The ASPIRE Utah Case Managers found this to be very helpful to their work.

Contracts and MOUs. USOR entered into eight contracts for the delivery of service interventions in Utah. They were with the Utah Parent Center, the Utah State Courts, AAA Fair Credit Foundation and five centers for independent living. These contracts continued for the term of ASPIRE. While administered by the ASPIRE Project Director, following DWS protocols, the Site Coordinator communicated regularly with the contractors and monitored their work. These contracts are:

- Utah Parent Center, Parent Training and Education, 10/15/14 – 2/28/19
- Utah Administrative Office of the Courts, Parent Training and Education, 5/22/17 – 9/30/18
- AAA Fair Credit Foundation, Financial Education and Capability Training, 2/11/2015 – 2/28/19
- Utah Independent Living Center, Youth Self-Determination Training, 10/31/14 – 2/28/19
- Red Rock Center for Independence, Youth Self-Determination Training, 11/3/2014 – 2/28/19
- Ability First Utah, Youth Self-Determination Training, 11/18/14 – 2/28/19
- Options for Independence, Youth Self-Determination Training, 11/20/14 – 2/28/19
- Roads to Independence, Youth Self-Determination Training, 11/20/14 – 2/28/19

Each of the centers for independent living covered a geographical area of the state. Separate contracts were needed with five centers for independent living to deliver the Youth Self-Determination Training in all areas where ASPIRE youth and families lived.

The ASPIRE Utah parents readily made their requests known. They asked for additional information to learn about the youth's rights at age 18. USOR entered into a contract with the Utah Administrative Office of the Courts to provide training for options such as guardianship, power of attorney, health directives, etc.

Interventions delivery. Each service intervention included the corresponding ASPIRE Scope of Work. As noted above, all contracts were for the term of ASPIRE. With the exception of The Utah Administrative Offices of the Courts (UAOC). UAOC only provided areas of the Parent Education and Training intervention related to options of guardianship, etc. This contract also did not include the period of the no cost extension, but rather ended on the original contact date of 9/30/2018. All of the Utah contractors provided excellent service, scaling up quickly and offering services in their regions or across the state.

In addition to typical monthly trainings, the parents and Case Managers also designed “Family Connection” evenings for the parents to have a broader overview of each service, before diving into greater detail at a training. All contracts, except those with the centers for independent living were amended to include rotating “Family Connection” opportunities throughout the state.

Intervention participation. ASPIRE Utah youth and family participated in the service interventions at a higher rate than the average participation of families across all of ASPIRE

Table 5. Utah Intervention Participation

Intervention	ASPIRE (n=1033)	Percent of participation	Utah (n=139)	Percent of Participation
Ever Employed	387	37.46%	62	44.60%
Self-Determination	451	43.66%	77	55.40%
Family Financial	499	48.31%	73	52.52%
Parent	301	29.14%	63	45.32%
Benefits Counseling	417	40.37%	79	56.83%

Advisory committee. Each ASPIRE Site organized an Advisory Committee. The ASPIRE Utah Advisory Committee was composed of the requisite PROMISE partners and representatives from the community and NGOs. Since this representation was very similar to an existing Council, the Coordinating Council for People with Disabilities (CCPD), it was decided to schedule the meetings back to back in order to make use of the agencies directors’ time. Overall, the meetings were helpful in connecting Case Managers to the necessary resources to serve the youth and families. While initially the consecutive meetings were helpful to participation, some CCPD meetings were canceled or rescheduled, impacting participation in the ASPIRE Advisory Committee. Additionally, what began as a resource for ASPIRE, became more of an update to the members.

American Indian Tribes. Utah is home to seven American Indian Tribes. ASPIRE Utah did not pursue relationships with these tribes, to receive approval to recruit and serve the youth and families living on the reservations.

Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)

State and Local Environment

Change in Agency. The changes to the location of ASPIRE in Utah had minor impacts on the continuity and effort of Staff. Each agency has its own procedures and effort was needed to ensure staff understood and were able to complete the new procedures and increased training. They had to make time for these administrative tasks. The Administrative Support Staff was able to assist with the tracking of mileage and creation of reimbursement forms. With the move to DWS, there appeared to be less understanding of what ASPIRE was and its connection to the federal PROMISE Research Study. A more complete 'warm' handoff by the agencies may have improved communication and procedures.

Administration

Responsiveness to Families. While the intended interventions and scopes of work met many needs, the Utah families were vocal in requesting more specific details. For example, the Utah Parent Center offered information about guardianship, but families wanted more legal guidance and technical assistance than is provided by a Parent Training and Information Center. The Utah team then sought other avenues to provide what the families were requesting. The UAOC was the perfect match as they do provide individual support and legal counseling to families.

Participation Rates. While participation in service interventions by ASPIRE Utah youth and parents was greater than the average across ASPIRE, the Utah Team was frequently disappointed in the turn-out at events. They found that annual recognition events were more popular with full families participating. They believed two things were responsible for this. First food was provided for everyone who came, making it appealing to parents. Second, when youth were told they would be recognized for graduating, overcoming challenges, participation, etc., they encouraged their families' attendance. Some parents commented that this event was the only time they heard positive comments about their children.

It should also be noted that participation rates among rural families, those who had to travel further, was actually higher than urban areas. It's difficult to know why this is the case, but one Case Manager noted that a few of her families often felt isolated. When ASPIRE provided mileage reimbursement, they could travel to meet other families in similar circumstances. It helped that food was provided as well.

Colorado

Structure. ASPIRE Colorado was originally located in the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). In June 2016, DVR moved under the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. When housed in CDHS, ASPIRE reported to the Program and Program Development Unit and the Manager of this Unit, who had been

involved in the planning of the ASPIRE proposal and application. The Site Coordinator and Program Manager met weekly and communication was excellent, and included participation in Unit meetings and trainings.

Upon moving to the Colorado Department of Human Services, ASPIRE moved to the Youth Services and Transition Unit. Meetings were less frequent, and did not include the Unit team meetings. Communication shifted from weekly, to an as needed basis. Mentoring and guidance in CDLE rules and regulations was provided by the Director of Workforce Programs.

Colorado is proud to be a “local control” state. This means that the delivery of developmental disability services, mental health services and school district services are governed by local entities. In fact, local delivery decisions are also made at some state workforce centers. They follow federal and state laws, but service delivery itself is a local decision. This has strong implications in the delivery of ASPIRE. Youth and families living in some counties may have access to a broader array of typical services, than those living in other counties. This is particularly true of school districts offering transition programs for youth ages 18 to 22 and requirements for graduation. Diverse services meant that ASPIRE youth and families were not always able to access the same services when moving to new counties.

[IRB reliance agreement \(2013\) and federal wide assurance \(2018\)](#). The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provided the initial Reliance Agreement to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board in 2014. DVR also met the new requirement in 2018 for a Federal Wide Assurance.

[Personnel – hiring, attrition and supervision](#). All ASPIRE Colorado positions were located in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. ASPIRE Colorado initially had the following positions: Manager (.25 FTE), Site Coordinator (1.0 FTE), Office Specialist (1.0 FTE) and Case Managers (8.0 FTE). Hiring was completed in a timely manner with no unexpected delays. The administrative positions and two Case Managers were located in the Denver metro area. Six Case Managers were located in VR offices around the state.

One individual filled the position of Colorado Site Coordinator through the term of ASPIRE. Three individuals filled the position of Administrative Assistant. When the third person resigned, the Administrative Assistant of the DVR Director stepped in to assist the Site Coordinator through the final four months of ASPIRE.

A total of 13 individuals filled the 9 Case Manager positions during ASPIRE. An additional Case Manager position was added in 2018 in anticipation of staff leaving prior to the end of ASPIRE. Two of the original 8 Case Managers remained in their positions throughout ASPIRE. The final two Case Managers were temporary and remained through the end of ASPIRE as well. Without a formal employment plan for ASPIRE staff to remain in DVR or CDLE, staff searched for and found alternative positions prior to the end of ASPIRE. Of the nine total positions, five remained through the end of ASPIRE.

When individuals resigned from ASPIRE and DVR, the Human Resource Department was responsive and generally stayed within their established 45 day procedures to fill vacancies. The only exception was one position in Arapahoe County which took longer to fill.

The turnover of the position in Arapahoe County impacted the case management services provided to ASPIRE youth and families. Three people filled this single position during ASPIRE. Additionally the position on the Western Slope of Colorado was filled by two individuals during ASPIRE. Despite staff being located across the state, it was still difficult to cover vacant caseloads due to the distance. The Site Coordinator stepped in on several occasions to assist with serving the ASPIRE youth and families while awaiting the hiring of new staff.

Staff meetings were held each month, with quarterly meetings in person. Staff participated in CDLE and DVR required trainings in addition to the requisite ASPIRE trainings. CDLE requires quarterly performance monitoring and annual evaluation. The Site Coordinator used case management data, case reviews and observations to conduct evaluation.

Contracts and MOUs. Contracting and procurement procedures in the Colorado Department of Human Services were followed to establish contracts for intervention providers. The “Documented Quote” process is used when costs are less than \$50,000 per year. Similar to an RFP process, the requirements are publicly posted, applications are received and reviewed and a final award is made. Approved Documented Quotes can continue so long as the monitoring shows successful implementation. Should implementation not be successful, the contract will end and the process begins anew. Upon moving to CDLE, this procurement process was questioned since it was not their typical process. However ASPIRE Documented Quotes were allowed to continue to reduce disruption to services and the length of time remaining for ASPIRE.

A total of five Documented Quotes were entered in Colorado to provide all interventions across the vast geographical area. DVR held all subcontracts. They included:

- Parent Education & Assistance for Kids (PEAK), Youth Self-Determination, 4/28/15 – 2/28/19
- Parent Education & Assistance for Kids (PEAK), Parent Education and Training, 4/28/15 – 2/28/19
- Mpowered, Financial Education and Capability Training, 4/29/15 – 4/20/16
- Budget Right, Financial Education and Capability Training, 4/21/16 – 2/28/19
- Ability Connections Colorado, Benefits Counseling, 4/29/15 – 2/28/19

The contract with Mpowered was terminated when two things occurred nearly simultaneously. First, Mpowered delivered training to only a limited geographical area rather than the entire state of Colorado and therefore was unable to provide services to all ASPIRE youth and families as required. Second, several families reported that they understood the SSI rules better than the instructor, particularly as related to the SSI asset/resource limit.

Intervention delivery. Each service intervention included the corresponding ASPIRE Scope of Work. As noted by the dates above, most contracts were for the term of ASPIRE. There were some delays in the start of service interventions. Additionally, the ASPIRE Colorado staff searched for and found affordable and suitable alternatives that met the ASPIRE Scopes of Work.

Budget Right provided individual, one on one meetings with families rather than group classes. PEAK initially offered half-day Parent and Youth Self-Determination Trainings. With low participation rates, Case Managers queried youth and families as to the best day/time/hours for trainings. Limited modifications were made, and participation did not necessarily improve. PEAK requested the contact information for ASPIRE youth and families, however without a signed Release, ASPIRE did not provide this to PEAK. Three families participated in the Alternative Delivery of the Financial Education and Capability Training through the Supported Online Financial Training.

Ability Connection Colorado had little previous experience with a younger population who had no work history. They adjusted to serving a new population, but struggled with unresponsive youth and families. Case Managers frequently stepped in to encourage youth and family response when contacted by Ability Connection Colorado.

Intervention participation. ASPIRE Colorado youth and families participated in the service interventions at a higher rate than the average participation of families across all of ASPIRE, in all interventions except Parent Education and Training

Table 6. Colorado Intervention Participation

Intervention	ASPIRE (n=1033)	Percent of participation	Colorado (n=226)	Percent of Participation
Ever Employed	387	37.46%	100	44.25%
Self-Determination	451	43.66%	123	54.42%
Family Financial	499	48.31%	113	50.00%
Parent	301	29.14%	64	28.32%
Benefits Counseling	417	40.37%	100	44.25%

American Indian Tribes. Colorado is home to two federally recognized American Indian Tribes, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Ute Mountain Tribe of the Ute Mountain Reservation. A review of Social Security provided zip codes revealed an extremely limited number of eligible youth. ASPIRE Colorado did not pursue relationships with these tribes, to receive approval to recruit and serve the youth and families living on the two reservations.

Advisory committee. ASPIRE Colorado’s Advisory Committee was composed of all the federal required partners, contractors and representatives of higher education. Early in ASPIRE, the members of the Advisory Committee provided training to staff, such as referrals and

procedures. They also came to use ASPIRE's lessons learned in their own practices. Committee members were also able to provide insights to Case Managers in how to connect with the local leadership in a particular county.

Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)

State and Local Environment

Local Control. Decisions for the delivery of services in Colorado is largely made at the local county level. Case Managers worked across counties and often experienced differences for the ASPIRE youth and families. Local control decisions also changed during the time of ASPIRE as voters in some areas opted to change funding priorities. Case Managers may have benefitted from a greater time commitment as ASPIRE began to understand the unique characteristics of each local county entity impacting their youth and families.

Administration

Change in Agency. The changes to the location of ASPIRE in Colorado did have an impact on continuity and effort of Staff, and in particular, the Site Coordinator. Each agency has its own procedures and effort was needed to ensure staff understood, and were able to complete the new procedures. Additionally, with the move to CDLE, there appeared to be less understanding of what ASPIRE was, and its connection to the federal PROMISE Research Study. A more complete 'warm' handoff by the agencies may have improved communication, processes and procedures.

Arizona

Structure. ASPIRE Arizona was located in the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family (GOYFF). Two positions were housed here: The ASPRE Manager (.5 FTE, Full Time Equivalent) and the ASPIRE Site Coordinator (1.0 FTE). They were responsible to implement ASPIRE in the state of Arizona. The GOYFF entered into all contracts for services, including case management and delivery of the service interventions. ASPIRE's first Site Coordinator was hired in May, 2014 and resigned in May, 2017. The second Site Coordinator was hired in June 2017 and resigned in May 2019, prior to the end of case management services. The final Site Coordinator was not replaced after resignation. The deputy director of the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family accepted responsibility to close all contracts.

IRB reliance agreement (2013) and federal wide assurance (2018). The Governor's Office of Youth Faith and Family and the Arizona Department of Education initially provided Reliance Agreements to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board in 2014. When the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension entered into contract with GOYFF, they also provided Reliance Agreement to the University of Utah Institutional Review Board (IRB). When the University of Utah IRB required a Federal Wide Assurance in 2018, both the GOYFF and UACE

complied. The Arizona Department of Education did not meet the requirement for a Federal Wide Assurance.

Personnel – hiring, attrition and supervision. Case management was contracted to the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) in April 2014. The number of Case Managers began with 13, and this increased to 15 in 2016. Later this number increased to a total of 17 positions. ADE had difficulty filling vacant positions, with some positions taking 11 months to post. After targeted discussion with the US Department of Education PROMISE Project Officer and the ASPIRE Project Director, the GOYFF was instructed to find a second contractor for implementation of case management services. In December 2016, GOYFF entered a contract with the UACE, which filled vacancies within two months. Ultimately, eight Case Managers were employed by ADE and nine were employed by UACE. A total of 25 individuals filled the 17 Case Manager positions during the time of ASPIRE.

The Arizona Department of Education hired an ASPIRE Supervisor to oversee the day to day work of the Case Managers, including those hired by the UACE. This was an agreement GOYFF reached with UACE and ADE. When the Supervisor was promoted in ADE, the responsibilities and duties were divided against the recommendations of both ASPIRE Project Director and OSEP Project Officer. The former Supervisor, under his new title, continued supervisory authority. A Case Manager Lead was created to provide mentoring and support to all Case Managers employed by both ADE and UACE.

This structure with the administration of ASPIRE Arizona directing by contract was challenging. It was further complicated by the need for two separate contracts for case management. In some instances, the Case Managers had one person signing their timesheet and performance evaluations who did not manage daily work; another person directing their daily work who was not their supervisor, and a Site Coordinator with no supervisory authority informing them of procedures and improvement needs. See Figures 2, 3 and 4 to understand the transition in ASPIRE Arizona structure through the term of ASPIRE.

Figure 1. ASPIRE Arizona Structure 2014 - 2016

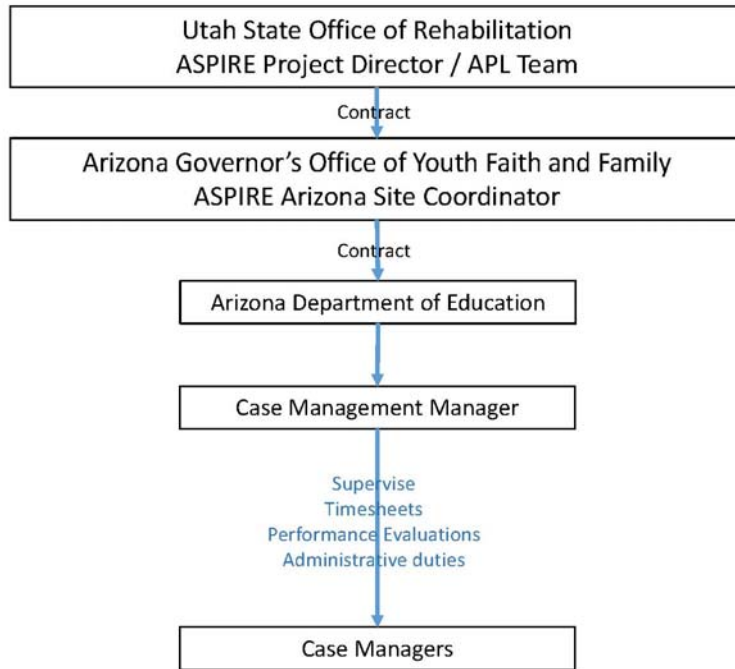


Figure 2. ASPIRE Arizona Structure 2016 – 2017

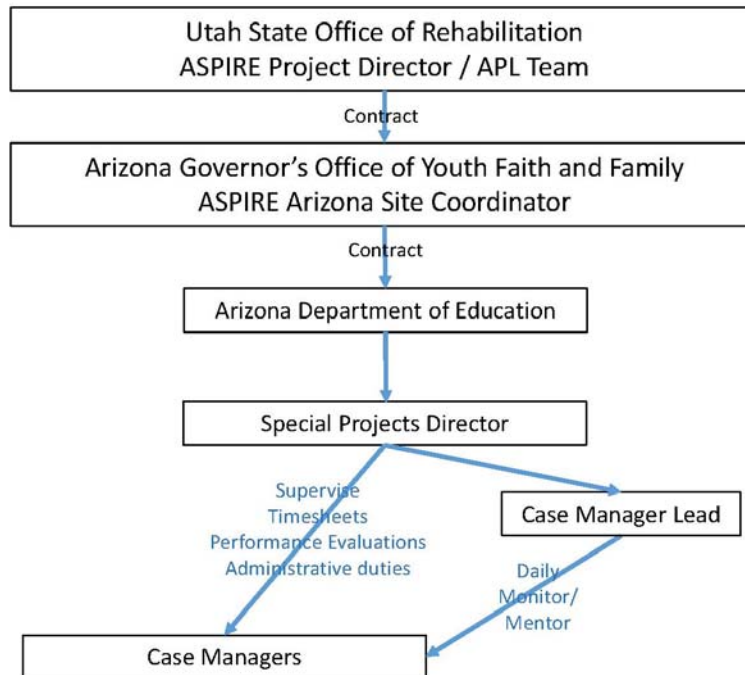
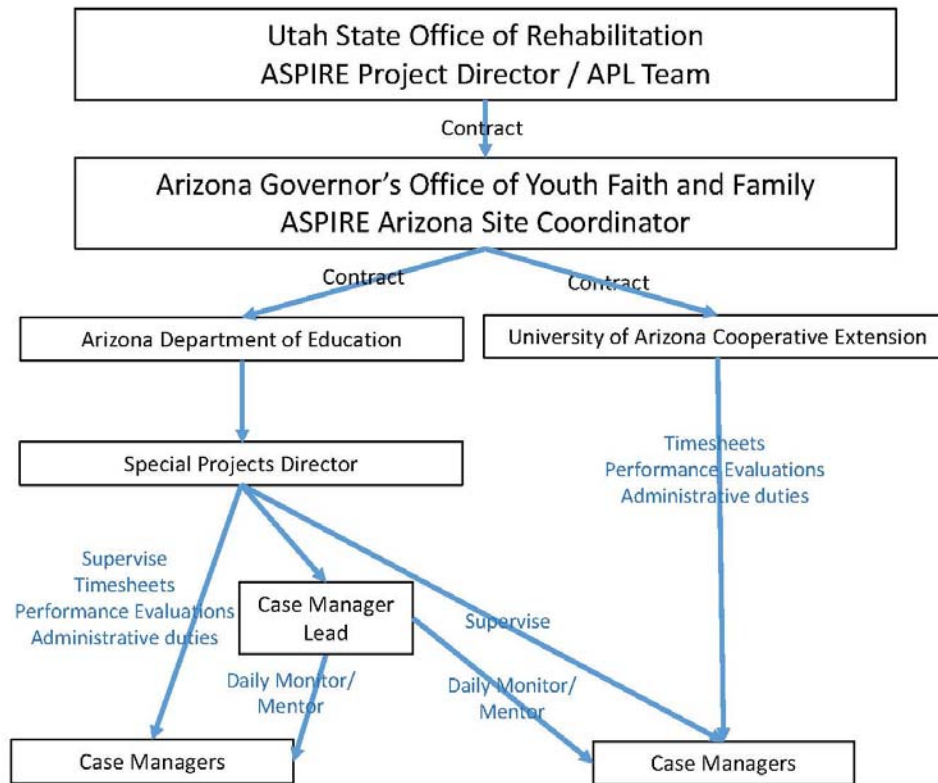


Figure 3. ASPIRE Arizona Structure 2017 – 2019



Ultimately, ASPIRE Arizona did not have a higher rate of turnover of other ASPIRE Sites. However, the challenge of filling positions had significant impacts on the outcomes of ASPIRE Arizona. There was a gap in hiring between January and November 2015, when no positions were filled. The hiring delays caused Arizona to lag behind the other sites in enrollment. Rather than having 13 Case Managers to recruit and enroll, this was primarily completed by just five staff and the Site Coordinator and Supervisor. In the end, this caused ASPIRE Arizona to fall short of its enrollment target, requiring the other sites who had completed their targets, to resume enrollment. Simultaneously, Case Managers were to provide case management services to youth and families who had already enrolled. Analysis of AIMS data showed that this did not happen, as Case Managers even noted that there were no services in several months as their focus was to complete enrollments.

Table 7. Arizona Case Management Onboarding and Attrition

Date	Number of Positions	Case Managers in place	New Hire	Vacant	Loss
2014	13	5		8	
1/1/2015	13	5		8	
1/1/2016	15	10	1	5	2
1/1/2017	15	10	7	5	1
1/1/2018	15	11	7	4	4
<i>Final 6 Months</i>					
12/1/2018	18	18	6	0	3
1/1/2019	18	18		0	1
2/1/2019	18	17		1	1
3/1/2019	18	17		6	5
4/1/2019	18	12		6	0
5/1/2019	18	12		6	0
5/31/2019 End Case Mgmt	18	10			

With enrollment ending in April 2016, Case Managers shifted to full-time provision of case management services, including monthly face-to-face meetings. When short Case Managers, the Site Coordinator and Supervisor were to take on cases, to ensure continuity of case management services. The first Site Coordinator and case management Supervisor did not take on this role, but rather distributed the cases to other Case Managers. With such large caseloads, many cases were without any services for up to 6 months. This impacted the participation levels of these youth and families, resulting in many becoming unresponsive.

Contracts and MOUs. As previously stated, the Governor’s Office of Youth, Faith and Family contracted with the Arizona Department of Education and the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension to provide Case Management services. Additionally, GOYFF contracted for service interventions. All contracts were for the term of one year, with annual renewals.

- Ability 360, Financial Education and Capability Training, 2/13/2015 – 2/28/2019
- Ability 360, Benefits Counseling, 2/13/2015 – 2/28/2019
- University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, Youth Self Determination, 8/26/2016 – 2/28/2019
- University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, Financial Education and Capability Training, 10/11/2018 – 2/28/2019
- Raising Special Kids, Parent Education and Training, 4/9/2014 – 5/31/2019

Intervention delivery. Overall, GOYFF was not timely in executing contracts for interventions. The Site Coordinator formed a committee to develop the Youth Self-Determination Training curriculum. They were slow to meet, only once per month, and when completed, none of the participating entities were willing to provide the training. The Site

Coordinator approached the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension (UACE) who agreed to contract to provide the training, beginning in August, 2016. UACE utilized their extension offices across the state to provide the Youth Self-Determination Training at the county level.

Raising Special Kids is the Parent Training and Information Center for the state of Arizona. The GOYFF memorandum of understanding with RSK was to provide additional workshops above their normal trainings, for parents in locations identified by the Site Coordinator or Case Managers. There were no funds included, and RSK was able to provide many opportunities for parents to participate.

Ability 360, Arizona's center for independent living agreed to provide the Financial Education and Capability Training, so long as ASPIRE trained their staff. ASPIRE supported three individuals to travel and be trained in the National Disability Institute "Financial Empowerment". Even with additional training and travel, Ability 360 struggled to offer Financial Education and Capability Training across the state. The Site Coordinator approached the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, who agreed to offer the training the final six months of ASPIRE.

Additionally, Ability 360 struggled to provide Benefits Counseling services. Several factors contributed to this.

1. ASPIRE funded three Benefits Specialists via contract to Ability 360. With the GOYFF contract beginning in February 2015, they were slow to take advantage of the funding. In fact, for the term of ASPIRE, Ability 360 did not dedicate a single FTE to ASPIRE. The limited number of CWICs, were now asked to serve an increased number of clients, causing delays and wait times. Youth and families became frustrated when months would pass from the date of referral to the appointment with the CWIC.
2. Arizona was without a Social Security Administration Area Work Incentive Coordinator (AWIC) during the time of ASPIRE. Contacting the AWIC is the typical process to receive a Benefits Planning Query (BPQY) upon which a Benefits Summary and Analysis is developed with the youth and family. Upon learning that Ability 360 was asking families to go to the local Social Security office to obtain their BPQY, the ASPIRE Project Director contacted the SSA PROMISE liaison for assistance. Additional barriers and challenges emerged around secure email. After discussion, it was decided that the Ability 360 CWICs would securely email the signed Release of Information to the ASPIRE Executive Secretary who, in turn would securely email the forms to SSA. This emailing process was reversed when SSA provided the BPQY. In total, 75 requests and BPQYs were exchanged through the ASPIRE Executive Secretary to provide Ability 360 with the necessary information to work with ASPIRE youth and families.
3. The supervisor of the Ability 360 CWICs was also reluctant to have them travel across the state, stating that the time spent traveling was wasted when the services could be provided remotely. This refusal to abide by their contract continued until the ASPIRE

Project Director intervened. The GOYFF contract contained more than sufficient funds for travel. The Project Director reminded Ability 360 that the purpose of hiring additional CWICS, as stated in the contract, was to overcome the barriers of distance to ensure in-person meetings. Ultimately, Ability 360 did increase their number of in-person meetings in the Phoenix area, but continued to serve other areas of the state remotely.

Intervention participation. ASPIRE Arizona youth and families participated in the service interventions at a lower rate than the average participation of families across all of ASPIRE. ASPIRE Arizona’s participation was the lowest of each of the sites in all interventions.

Table 8. Arizona Intervention Participation

Intervention	ASPIRE (n=1033)	Percent of participation	Arizona (n=505)	Percent of Participation
Ever Employed	387	37.46%	115	22.77%
Self-Determination	451	43.66%	149	29.50%
Family Financial	499	48.31%	208	41.19%
Parent	301	29.14%	107	21.19%
Benefits Counseling	417	40.37%	133	26.34%

Intensive monitoring by ASPIRE and OSEP. As previously noted there were many challenges in the implementation of ASPIRE in Arizona. In October 2015, David Emenheiser, ASPIRE’s Project Officer from the US Department of Education attended ASPIRE’s semi-annual meeting in Denver. While there, he and the Project Director met with the Arizona Site Coordinator (GOYFF) and the Case Management Supervisor (ADE). This meeting included a review of delay in contracting by GOYFF, and the delay in hiring of Case Managers by ADE, both of which were significantly impacting Arizona’s implementation of ASPIRE.

The following data were reviewed: Enrollment, case management, caseload size and intervention implementation. The meeting resulted in a commitment by the Site Coordinator and the Case Management Supervisor to expedite contracting implementation and hiring. It was agreed that the Project Officer, Project Director and Site Coordinator would meet regularly, up to every two weeks, until these challenges were resolved.

The regular meetings continued, however on February 27, 2016, GOYFF informed the ASPIRE Project Director that the Case Management Supervisor in ADE had been promoted and a new Case Manager Lead had been selected, all to begin the following week. These decisions were made without the Project Director’s knowledge or input and continued without approval.

Similarly, in May 2017, the Arizona Site Coordinator announced her resignation. Upon learning this, the Project Officer reminded the departing Site Coordinator and her supervisor in GOYFF that this position was “Key Personnel” as defined in PROMISE legislation, and the

replacement would require OSEP approval. Five days later, the supervisor informed the Project Director that a new Site Coordinator had been hired, without OSEP approval. All of these changes in ASPIRE Arizona, without the knowledge of the Project Officer or Director, resulted in the decision by the OSEP Project Officer and Project Director to conduct the required ASPIRE Site Visit in Arizona.

ASPIRE Site Visit. In June 2017, the remaining five sites were operating as expected with contracts in place and interventions being provided. While Arizona's contracts were in place, they continued to lag in the hiring of Case Managers and the implementation of service interventions. Only the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension was delivering their contracted services as expected. They had also recently hired three of the five Case Managers in their contract.

The Project Director and Site Coordinator created an agenda for the ASPIRE Site Visit that included meeting with each contracted provider. The contracts were reviewed and reasons for delays were discussed. It was expected that once challenges were identified and discussed, implementation would be expedited. Contrary to this expectation and contract, Ability 360 did not hire the three additional CWICs. However, they did begin providing Family Financial Education and Training more regularly in more locations across the state. Ability 360 had also changed the referral process several times prior to the Site Visit, confusing Case Managers and ASPIRE youth and families. Following the Site visit, Ability 360 did not change the procedures for the remainder of ASPIRE.

The Arizona Department of Education made a commitment to an accelerated hiring process during the Site Visit, however this did not come to fruition. ASPIRE Arizona continued to rely on the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension to more quickly hire Case Managers. Additionally, the roles of the Case Manager Lead and Special Projects Supervisor were discussed in relation to their supervision of UACE staff. ADE insisted that the Case Managers understood the various roles, but this was inconsistent with reports received by the Project Director. This was not resolved through the term of ASPIRE. Case Managers continued to report confusion. The Project Director referred them to ASPIRE procedures rather than internal discussions.

All in all the Department of Education determined that ASPIRE was in compliance, with the expectation that the Arizona Site would continue to improve as a result of the Site Visit.

American Indian Tribes. Arizona is home to 21 federally recognized American Indian Tribes. Two tribes provided approval to recruit, enroll and serve youth and families living on their reservations. These are the Navajo Nation and the Hualapai Tribe of the Hualapai Reservation. The Navajo Nation is the largest in population of all tribes (2010 Census). The Hualapai Tribe provided approval quite late in the enrollment period, and no youth were enrolled on the Hualapai Reservation.

Advisory committee. Each ASPIRE Site organized an Advisory Committee. The Arizona Advisory Committee was composed of the requisite PROMISE partners and representatives

from the community and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Overall, the meetings were helpful in connecting Case Managers to the necessary resources to serve the youth and families. Over time, there was a shift as members generally sought updates on ASPIRE research, data and results.

Challenges and Successful Strategies (Lessons Learned)

State and local environment.

Purchasing. Neither the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family nor the Arizona Department of Education had a process by which to purchase items for an individual youth. Known as Participant Support in ASPIRE, it was a mechanism by which ASPIRE could provide necessary items such as transit passes, course registrations, application fees, etc. Several workarounds were developed to overcome this challenge.

First, the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation made purchases and shipped to Arizona. There were delays due to the timeline for purchasing and shipping. Additionally, this shifted the fiscal responsibility to the project while reducing the need for these funds in Arizona. The Utah State Office of Rehabilitation also entered contracts with two Arizona transit authorities, purchasing day transit passes and shipping these to the Site Coordinator.

Secondly, the GOYFF included purchases for events and Participant Support in the contract for case management at the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension. This allowed for purchasing closer to where youth and families lived.

Communication. As a single Model Demonstration Project, all ASPIRE procedures needed to be implemented to fidelity. In Case Reviews conducted by both the Evaluation and APL Teams, ASPIRE Arizona had the most drift away from procedures. In other sites, it was common for the Site Coordinator and Case Manager to contact the APL Trainers to clarify procedures or invite the Project Director to staff meetings to discuss particular procedures. Arizona reluctantly accepted the Project Director's insistence to participate in staff meetings, when it was felt the procedures needed to be communicated directly.

Throughout ASPIRE, a clear message from APL was that no data entry is perfect, and that everyone can improve, and if you have a question, ask the source. In general, every Case Manager contacted the Project Director or Trainers multiple times during ASPIRE, with the exception of the Arizona Case Managers. The Project Director took it upon herself to call Arizona Case Managers directly to complement them on their work, inform them of when one of their youth won a monthly prize drawing, etc. It was during these conversations that it was reported that the Arizona team had been instructed not to call the Project Director or Trainers, but to ask each other. This may explain why some procedures were not followed, as the Case Managers were asking each other, and possibly exacerbating the problem by continuing to share misinformation rather than correct procedures.

In a project as large as ASPIRE, with up to 60 staff across six states, it's imperative that each member of the team feel comfortable, if not encouraged, to go to the source of information. It is unclear how much of this is the culture of the individual agencies involved.

Administration.

Multiple Hiring Authorities. While overall, the relationship among the GOYFF, ADE and UACE was positive, there were challenges to the hiring and retention of staff. ADE's inability to fill positions in a timely manner caused significant delays in both enrollment and case management. While the introduction of UACE expedited the hiring of staff, it caused other challenges. Though GOYFF worked to keep the Case Manager salary equitable between ADE and UACE, the benefits available to UACE Case Managers included tuition waivers and expanded healthcare. This caused some difficult feelings among the Case Managers hired by ADE. While no one stated this as a resignation reason, it did occupy the thought time of the ADE staff.

The arrangement for ADE to supervise UACE personnel was a complicated one. With increasing numbers of Case Managers located in UACE, the Project Director proposed that the position of supervisor move from ADE to UACE. ADE's response was that they would not allow someone outside of ADE to supervise their personnel. And though UACE was willing to hire Case Manager's on the GOYFF's behalf, they did not have sufficient staff to provide supervision. This resulted in the perplexing situation discussed earlier with staff not knowing whose direction to follow. While theoretically, the ASPIRE procedures were the same regardless of hiring authority, a few Case Managers tailored their methods by reaching out to multiple parties for advice, until they received an alternative way of proceeding with their duties, often not aligning to ASPIRE Procedures. This resulted in confusion regarding the actual procedures, and inordinate amount of time by the supervisors, Site Coordinator and Project Director confirming the correct procedures. However, without accountability to a single authority, several Arizona Case Managers continued to pick and choose what they would do.

It would have been more effective, less challenging and more time critical if all the Case Managers worked in one agency and were directly supervised by the Site Coordinator.

Audit Staff Work. Distance supervision of Case Managers is a difficult task. ASPIRE began auditing cases in 2016. However it was difficult for Site Coordinators to make the time needed to conduct thorough audits of each Case Manager's work. With many tasks already to complete, the several hours needed to audit each case was difficult to find. In 2017, ASPIRE began distributing intervention participation and contacts meetings for each Case Manager, each month. In doing so, Case Managers were held accountable to their peers rather than remaining anonymous when a Site or ASPIRE data were discussed. In fact, there was a substantial change in the number of monthly contacts in the Arizona Site. However, a review of this data had the evaluation and APL Teams questioning the reliability of some entries in AIMS. Auditing work should have begun earlier in the project. While it would have provided clear

analysis of the Case Managers' work, it may still have been difficult to address expectations without a clear line of authority in ASPIRE Arizona.

Monitoring Subcontractors. Frequent meetings with contractors will ensure that they remain on task with the delivery of their services, without drifting to previously established work. In the case of Arizona, the ASPIRE Project Director had to intervene in the two contracts with Ability 360 to ensure they completed their work to the requirements of their contract with GOYFF. Site Coordinators should track all communication, and monitor the details such as trainings offered, diversity of locations, invoice details, etc. It did not appear that the quarterly reporting by each contractor identified successes or areas to improve.

Summary of Challenges and Success Strategies by ASPIRE

Operating a Consortium

Organizing and implementation of a research study to fidelity, across a consortium of six states was a challenge. ASPIRE had strong leadership among both the Management Team and the Leadership team. However, with 60 staff from a variety of backgrounds, it was difficult for many to understand there were non-negotiable procedures in a research study. As a study with clear procedures and expected outcomes, decisions were made with input from several levels, but still resulted in some individuals not agreeing with the procedures and ultimately not implementing their positions to fidelity.

As a five-year study, it must be noted that this is longer than an election cycle and resulted in changes in Governors, cabinet members, and other political appointments. There were also changes in federal laws, such as the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act during the time of PROMISE. This resulted in changes to administrative priorities, policies and procedures, effecting contracts, agencies' policies. This resulted in creating the time needed to inform and education the new officials, as well as learn their new procedures. Investing this time is critically important for the Project Director and the Site Coordinators.

During the individual site visits, the Project Director made time to meet with new agency directors, supervisors, etc. in an effort to raise their awareness of PROMISE and ASPIRE.

Authority and Accountability

Supervision lines must be clear in a consortium. To have one employer would be ideal, but then it would not be a consortium. The final authority must be the Project Director. It is his or her responsibility to evaluate the project and the work of individuals, including the Site Coordinators. At times, Site Coordinators questioned the work of APL, noting that the Project Director or Trainers were not supervisors. Providing performance data and youth/parent

participation data was quite telling. It often required action by supervisors. Without supervisory authority, the Project Director must insure that the Site Coordinators in each state were fully vested in any formative adjustments and would lead their site teams or individuals to work to fidelity. Just as the Project Director was managing remotely, so too the Site Coordinators were managing remotely. As such accountability of work could be intermittent. Performance Evaluations often reflected the boilerplate of the agency, rather than the work of ASPIRE.

Another aspect of authority was the ability to raise procedural challenges to a level that they could be resolved in each agency or organization. Frequently a unique or untested challenge would arise, requiring resolution at a level above the Site Coordinators. Response time varied by agency, and in some cases were not resolved for months. This resulted in long delays in providing services or supports to ASPIRE youth and families. Some were resolved more quickly by just identifying an alternative process outside the agency. But some were never resolved.

A component of authority and accountability is the need to manage by contract. A consortium is complicated by the need for contracts to implement services. In ASPIRE six states executed a total of 58 contracts. Communicating tangible expectations and deliverables is vital. In addition to clear written expectations, there must be frequent conversations about both challenges and achievements. ASPIRE contractors completed quarterly reports for the intervention Scope of Work included in the contract. But a quarter may be a very long time if monitoring reveals specific problems. Course corrections can be made quickly when there is more frequent conversations.

Fiscal Processes

With 13 hiring authorities and 58 subcontracts, there were a plethora of fiscal procedures, reporting practices and timelines. A few examples may best highlight these many challenges.

It was discovered that one agency rather than billing within 90 days of the quarter's end, was actually invoicing 180 days later. While it aligned to their practices, it was not allowed by their contract. After an investigation, it was discovered the financial officer was doing this with all funds and invoicing within the organization. ASPIRE's careful review of invoices led to the discovery of a systemic non-compliance problem in the agency.

Purchasing is unique to each organization. For example, some were unable to purchase any items for an individual. Some were allowed to make purchases, but not allowed to purchase gift cards. Some forbid the purchasing of food. Several strategies were needed to resolve these. Alternative organizations or the Project Director made purchases that were not allowed by some, including entering into contracts with transit companies in other states. Fiscal offices would only make exceptions with a targeted letter from the Project Director.

USOR made swag purchases in the state, and shipped to other states. The Project Director even secured 'letters of exception' from the State of Utah Finance Director for purchasing in USOR that was outside of standard policies.

Gift cards, transit passes and other participant support items, are considered to have cash value. As such, ASPIRE required fiduciary tracking of each item from point of purchase to point of delivery to the ASPIRE youth or parent, with signatures at each juncture. In ASPIRE, this was literally thousands of dollars. Staff were very slow to submit these to the Site Coordinator or Project Director. The ASPIRE Executive Secretary consistently reminded the Site Coordinators to submit these each month. As ASPIRE was closing, these reminders became more frequent. Case Managers were suddenly returning hundreds of dollars in transit passes to the Project Director. With limited time remaining, the Executive Secretary researched previous youth recipients. The Project Director then mailed them to ASPIRE youth who would utilize them.

Internal Agency Procedures

Travel moratoriums were intermittently in place in several states during ASPIRE. In state and out of state travel for semi-annual trainings were listed as required in the contracts. However, frequently the Project Director had to provide a letter stating that the travel was required for ASPIRE and PROMISE. With a letter from the Project Director, authorities allowed ASPIRE staff to complete required travel.

Related to travel is the ability to transport non-employees, specifically ASPIRE youth and families. Some agencies prohibit the use of personal vehicles to transport clients. Other agencies do allow it when specific liability concerns are addressed. Some agencies provide transportation to only the client, in this case, the ASPIRE youth, but not other family members.

Communication

While every effort was made to meet in person, ASPIRE communication relied heavily on electronic formats. ASPIRE utilized email, conference calls, GoToMeeting and GoToWebinar formats to maintain communication. It is a challenge to discuss critical issues and procedures remotely. Staff may be preoccupied with work offline or be unwilling to contribute to the discussions. The Project Director and Trainers learned to wait patiently as staff processed information at different rates. Yet, silence can also be awkward. During meetings or trainings, individuals were called upon to answer questions or add to the conversation. While this could make some uncomfortable, effort was made to question all participants so that everyone's insights were valued and no one felt singled out.

Implications for Future Consortium

It is possible to implement a research study to fidelity in a consortium of states. However, it is not without careful planning, great effort, creativity and flexibility. Future leaders of Consortia have much to consider.

Considerations before Beginning

Ask every possible question as the Consortium is formed. No question is too simple. In fact, asking questions and the resulting discussion may identify further questions or difficulties.

Who will hire staff? What is the supervisory line? What is allowed and not allowed for travel, purchasing, etc. in the organization? Are there avenues for exceptions to allow for trying new interventions in a research study? If matching funds are necessary, what will happen when they are no longer available? What will happen in the case of an administration change and reprioritization means one state will no longer participate? What are personnel costs in each state? How will salaries be equitable to employment in a particular geographical location, but also to staff in other locations?

ASPIRE created a list of over 73 possible services to be provided and asked each state to identify its provider. If any were unable to do so, an alternative ASPIRE service had to be developed and budgeted.

Don't assume everyone has the same passion and vision. Some may not even appreciate the need for fidelity of the work. Some people may be in it for the funds that can be generated or to advance their own careers. It can be very difficult to ascertain this when forming relationships. Make time to build those relationships in advance of an application.

Deciding who will be the recipient and manager of the Consortium is critical. This means putting aside personal interests to determine which agency or organization is best suited, has previous experience and is willing to bear both accolades and criticisms. In the end, having a strong applicant with a diverse, evidenced history will not only add to the value of the proposal, but if awarded, will result in stronger leadership and experience.

In this technology and social world, consider what you will need during the project. As budgets are planned, consider if media or social media will be needed. This is more than positing on Facebook or twitter. Will videos be needed? Who will record, edit and produce project products. It's best to plan for this early rather than decide later there are no funds to do so.

The Operation of a Consortium

Structure. With large numbers of staff, across large geographical areas, strong central management is needed. There is no question that staff members will be more vested in the research integrity process if they feel their opinions and ideas are valued. Ultimately a decision is made which all may or may not support. It's important to value their input and make the time to dialogue. However, there are times when they may not like the conclusion or procedural decision.

Assigning tasks which cross the state boundaries may increase buy-in by site leadership. For example, if one site coordinator were responsible for a single intervention or area, then there would be greater understanding of what is happening across the consortium, rather than concern only with the single site he or she coordinated. Building cross-site responsibilities into the structure of a consortium will strengthen the knowledge and skills of all leadership.

Documentation is essential. When notes of all meetings or essential conversations are kept and shared, there is greater transparency. Also, the notes become a record of items discussed, resolutions negotiated and decisions are made. No one person can remember everything. Having notes supports the reasons behind decisions. It will also help when there is attrition and new staff want to understand the 'why' of procedures.

Consistent meeting schedule. It's important for leadership to meet regularly, but also important that the entire team meet regularly. This includes face to face, in-person meetings as well as internet or phone-based meetings. Send the message of 'ask rather than presume'. Each person brings their own experiences and expectations that may or may not align to the project. Maintaining adherence to project procedures will prevent drift away from fidelity.

Monitor work. Set the expectation that all positions will be expected to monitor their own work and the work of others, including their peers. Be prepared to provide hard data such as reports that can be parsed to the individual, team and project levels. Make a schedule that includes task monitoring as well as comprehensive monitoring. Establish a process to provide feedback and follow up. Include the monitoring in each position's performance evaluations.

Work may be completed in more than one time zones. While flexibility is needed, plan ahead for time changes and try to stay consistent in meeting times. Adjust deadlines as needed.

Communication and relationships. Strong communication is vital when a project is directed remotely. While costly, leadership must meet with staff in person and establish rapport and respect. When relationships exist, there's less pointing to "THEM" who tell me what do to, or "THEY" when a person doesn't like a procedure. Regular communication and team building activities help to establish and maintain relationships. Develop a plan of how each position is communicating regularly with other positions. For example, front-line staff

should be welcomed to speak with leadership. Supervisors must be willing, even encouraging, to have subordinates contact other leaders.

Diversity and cultural considerations. With many communities represented in a consortium, it is vital to make the time and seek the expertise to build relationships. These diverse communities may include Tribes, ethnic or cultural and race. Some may suggest hiring staff from within these communities. However, what is more important is to create the time to develop the relationships.

Participation in ASPIRE was quite diverse. Seek out opportunities to learn about the culture of your participants. Do not rely solely on staff, but rather reach out to professionals and members of a cultural community. Many are very willing to share what they know that can make working within the communities more productive. This is particularly true for American Indian communities. American Indian Tribes control access to their members. Seeking approval from the tribe's Institutional Review Board or the Tribal Council will be necessary. Additionally, learn the governmental structure and stay in touch with the individuals who approved the work and who can advance your work.

It may also be a budgetary consideration should travel be necessary. Utilize other resources and contacts who have relationships with these communities and build upon those which are existing. Reach out to state or agency contacts charged with working within the communities and seek counsel for how to build and maintain the relationships.

Personnel and attrition. Use common job descriptions, regardless of who is the employer. Sub-recipients will often have established position descriptions, but expect that project tasks will be included. Have similar expectations for performance goals and evaluations. Be included in the hiring and evaluation of all staff. The Project Director needs to have input in the evaluation of each staff member.

Monitor salaries and avoid any significant salary differentials. While some consideration must be given to the residence location, be prepared to explain any differentials and take action that ensures salary and benefits are equitable.

Expect staff to leave. Even key individuals who strongly believe in the purpose of the study, will leave when an opportunity arises to advance their. In ASPIRE, 99 individuals filled 59 positions in six years, a nearly 50% turnover. This included a 45% turnover among the Case Managers. The most frequently filled position was that of the Administrative Support with 19 individuals for six positions. As an entry level position, individuals often use the position to begin their careers, and leave as they seek to advance their careers.

As necessary, have approval for hiring for more positions than you have available. This allows positions to be posted and filled more quickly. If there are several sub-recipients hiring staff, use a common position description and common performance evaluation goals.

Contracting. As previously stated, management by contract is complex. Contracts should be comprehensive and include all possible contingencies. Keep the number of contracts as few as possible. A great deal of time and effort must be invested in the development and monitoring of contracts. If subcontracting is allowed by sub-recipients, include project leadership's monitoring role in the sub-recipient's contract. Examples of language to include are:

- Federal references for fiscal processes.
- Supervisory lines and authorities
- Allow, or not, subcontracting for key personnel or activities.
- Participation in performance evaluation, including quarterly progress.
- Notification of Director in all personnel vacancies, and decisions before they are made.
- As allowable, include that Consortium procedures will supersede the state's procedures, such as travel and purchasing, or at least that a dialogue will occur arriving to a mutually agreed upon outcome.

Closing a Consortium

As a Consortium needs the end, staff will be leaving to secure new positions. Encourage all sub-recipients to develop retention plans to maintain continued employment in another department or area. If possible, develop performance incentives that are paid as work is completed for the closure.

Work with staff to develop the knowledge and skills of the job search, resume development, interview practice and more. Develop lists of knowledge and skills directly learned and developed on the project. Teach them to use that information to market themselves as the best candidate for a job. Then they are positioned to negotiate not only their hourly wage, but also the time needed to complete their work before resigning.

Develop a plan to close with fidelity when the number of staff are shrinking. Who will take over the work when there are fewer and fewer staff to complete it? Develop a timeline that allows staff to prepare for new employment, while also considering the needs of formal closure, data analysis, publication, etc.

Identify the 'home' of all project products. If the consortium is one time, then the project website may not continue. Where will your products, publications and information live after the project? Also, most federal awards require the archiving of data and information for several years. How will this be done on behalf of the consortium, when funding will lapse prior to this deadline?

Summary

Creating and operating a consortium of states is a complicated and difficult task. ASPIRE has learned a great deal as challenges emerged and resolutions were sought. The value of key

personnel, committed to fidelity, is essential. Speaking with one voice rather than separate Sites was critical. This included investing time in the relationships among staff at all levels and between levels. A second equally important attribute is creativity and the ability to generate exceptions or workarounds that satisfy both the need and the supervisory authority.

Attachment A: List of ASPIRE Contracts and MOUs.

Utah State Office of Rehabilitation

1. Arizona Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family
2. Colorado Department of Department of Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, transitioned to the Department of Labor and Employment.
3. Montana Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Employment and Transition Division
4. Minot State University, Center for Persons with Disabilities
5. South Dakota Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services
6. University of Utah, Office of Sponsored Project (Formative Evaluation)
7. University of Utah, Biomedical Research Informatics (Management Information System)
8. City of Phoenix, Arizona Public Transit Department
9. Professional Transit Management of Tucson Arizona
10. Easterseals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain Inc.

American Indian Tribes (Review Board or Council Approval)

1. Hualapai Tribe of the Hualapai Reservation (AZ)
2. Navajo Nation (AZ)
3. Confederated Tribes of Salish and Kootenai (MT)
4. Northern Cheyenne Tribe (MT)
5. Blackfeet Nation (MT)
6. Standing Rock (ND and SD)
7. Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (ND)
8. Oglala Sioux Tribe (SD)
9. Rosebud Sioux Tribe (SD)
10. Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Tribe of Lake Traverse Reservation (SD)
11. Crow Creek Sioux Tribe (SD)

University of Utah, Office of Sponsored Projects (Formative Evaluation)

1. University of Montana
2. University of Kansas

Arizona Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family

1. Arizona Department of Education (Case Management)
2. University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension (Case Management)
3. University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension (Youth Self Determination Training)
4. Ability 360 (Arizona Bridge to Independent Living) (Financial Training)
5. Ability 360 (Arizona Bridge to Independent Living) (Benefits Counseling)
6. Raising Special Kids (Parent Training)

**Colorado Department of Human Services (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment),
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

1. Ability Connection Colorado, Inc. (Benefits Counseling)
2. Mpowered (Financial Training)
3. Budget Right, LLC (Financial Training)
4. Parent Education & Assistance for Kids (PEAK) (Parent Training)
5. Parent Education & Assistance for Kids (PEAK) (Youth Self-Determination Training)

**Montana – Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Employment and Transition
Division**

1. The Office of Public Instruction (Case Managers)
2. Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (Youth Self Determination)
3. Montana Independent Living Project (Benefits Counseling)
4. Montana Independent Living Project (Youth Self Determination)
5. Montana State University Billings (Benefits Counseling)
6. North Central Independent Living Services (Benefits Counseling)
7. North Central Independent Living Services (Youth Self Determination)
8. Parents Let's Unite for Kinds (Parent Training)
9. Rural Dynamics Inc. (Financial Training)
10. SUMMIT Independent Living Center (Benefits Counseling)
11. SUMMIT Independent Living Center (Youth Self Determination)

Minot State University (North Dakota)

1. Pathfinder (Parent Training)
2. Building Inclusive Partnerships (Parent Training)
3. Rehab Services, Inc. (Benefits Counseling)
4. Dakota Center for Independent Living (Financial Training)
5. Options Interstate Resource Center (Financial Training)
6. Independence Inc. Center for Independent Living (Financial Training)
7. North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (Youth Self-Determination Training)

South Dakota Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services

1. South Dakota Parent Connection
2. Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (Case Managers)
 - a. Consumer Credit Counseling Services of the Black Hills (Financial Training)
 - b. Lakota Funds (Financial Training)
 - c. Lutheran Social Services Center for Financial Resources (Financial Training)
 - d. South Dakota Benefits Specialist Network (Benefits Counseling)

Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (Utah Service Interventions)

1. Ability First Utah (Youth Self-Determination)
2. Active Re-Entry (Youth Self-Determination)
3. Options for Independence (Youth Self-Determination)
4. Red Rock Center for Independence (Youth Self-Determination)

5. Roads to Independence (Youth Self-Determination)
6. Utah Independent Living Center (Youth Self-Determination)
7. Utah Parent Center (Parent Training)
8. AAA Fair Credit Foundation (Financial Training)
9. Utah Administrative Offices of the Courts (Parent Training)